United Nations A/59/PV.13

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

13th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 28 September 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping .... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Akayev (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you most warmly on your election to the important post of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and to wish you success in your very complex task. I also wish to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte.

In our troubled times, humankind is placing its most cherished hopes on the United Nations. Here at the rostrum of this Organization, I would like to express our deep satisfaction with the resolve with which the present session of the Assembly has embarked on a policy that is a quest for effective solutions to the key problems now facing the international community.

After 11 September, the highest priority unquestionably has been given to fighting international terrorism, which has now acquired the nature of a direct war. This is an evil challenge to humankind. We sincerely grieve for the innocent victims of terrorist acts, wherever they may occur. Any victim evokes sympathy, but the massacre of children in Beslan is hideously evil. The time has come for terrorists to be called to account for their criminal acts.

The "terrorist international" must be faced with a united anti-terrorist front on all continents, regions and countries. It is therein that I see the key to victory.

The tone was set for this session by the statement made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. With his customary perspicacity, he emphasized that the highest value is that of the supremacy of law in domestic and foreign affairs. Genuine interest in organizing collective action to address new challenges and threats was a leitmotif of the statements made from this rostrum by United States President George Bush, the heads of several States, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, and other high-ranking representatives. Those statements were evidence of the growing confidence in our Organization and, I believe, represent a long-awaited rebuff to those who wish us ill and to sow doubts regarding the United Nations ability to resolve today's pressing problems.

A special feature of our forum today is the fact that, along with other extremely important objectives, it must serve as a preparatory stage for the sixtieth

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anniversary session of the General Assembly. The international community has the right to expect that next year's session will prove to be an historic event and establish new landmarks for United Nations activity. Recalling the ideals endorsed by the founders of the United Nations, and on the basis of contemporary requirements, I would propose that the anniversary session be called a summit of peace and economic and social progress.

Turning now to the United Nations role in the life of my country, I should like to convey to the Organization and its specialized agencies our sincere gratitude for their support of our national efforts in all areas of State-building. My people will forever recall the decision taken at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly in support of the 2,200th anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood.

One axiom of Kyrgyz foreign policy is that small countries must have big friends. For us, the United Nations has always been such a tried and trusted friend. That is most appropriate for the development of our Republic on its path to democracy. It is well known that the electoral process is considered to be a litmus test for the level of democracy achieved in any given country. This year, with direct assistance from Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the implementation of a United Nations project in Kyrgyzstan has initiated improvements to the national electoral system with a view to ensuring that it meets international standards. That is particularly important given the election campaign now beginning to organs of power at every level in the Republic. In that context, United States President George Bush's proposal that a fund for democracy be established within the United Nations is indeed a good one. Such a fund would substantially enhance the United Nations potential in that area.

I should now like to turn to another problem. Two years ago, under United Nations auspices, the Global Mountain Summit was convened in our capital, Bishkek. In that context, too, we are most grateful for the Secretary-General's assistance. The Bishkek Global Mountain Platform was drafted at the Summit, defining key objectives for the sustainable development of mountain countries. That important document was submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

At this session, I wish also to draw the international community's attention to the needs of the least developed mountain countries. The time has come to propose, on behalf of interested countries, the adoption at this session of a special resolution recommending forgiveness of the foreign debt of the least developed mountain countries. That would serve as a powerful stimulus to their comprehensive development and to overcoming poverty and would fully jibe with the objectives proclaimed in the Millennium Declaration. A draft resolution on that subject will be submitted to the General Assembly by the delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic and other delegations.

In considering future prospects, I believe that the interests of all groups of countries are most fully reflected in the decisions of the Millennium Summit. I am gratified that a thorough and scrupulous analysis of the results of five years of implementation of the Millennium Declaration is being planned as a major element on the agenda of the sixtieth anniversary session of the General Assembly. I consider the war on poverty to be of great importance in that context. The link between poverty and international terrorism is indisputable. Those phenomena are organically intertwined. Unless we can overcome poverty and the mass despair and sense of hopelessness it entails, in particular among young people, our hopes for uprooting international terrorism may indeed prove futile.

In seeking to eradicate poverty, Kyrgyzstan is relying above all on its own potential. We are most grateful in that respect for the assistance of the United Nations and the international community, expressed, inter alia, in the Monterrey Consensus. In that connection, we are hoping for increased assistance through the United States Millennium Challenge Account. In general, assistance for the development of poor countries could be considerably enhanced. I believe that this problem will also be duly reflected in the work of the present and anniversary sessions of the General Assembly.

Earlier, I linked the eradication of poverty and the fight against international terrorism. Within the range of interlinked measures, however, a policy to eradicate international terrorism through the vigorous application of collective force is of unique significance. Within the framework of the anti-terrorist Coalition now active under United States auspices, Kyrgyzstan is making an important contribution to suppressing the ever-active hotbed of terrorism in Afghanistan. I am convinced that the October elections in that country will be a very important factor in its democratic reorganization and have a positive impact on the situation in the region as a whole.

In order to enhance its contribution to the international community's war on international terrorism, Kyrgyzstan has allowed the deployment on its territory — within limited parameters, I would emphasize — of armed Russian and United States contingents. We are convinced that, in so doing, we are strengthening the interaction of those great Powers in today's war on a common enemy. Our Kyrgyz land will continue to be a place for the great Powers to cooperate and to pool their efforts, rather than to compete.

We support international action to eradicate the terrorist threat in Iraq. That has become the principal obstacle to the development of democracy and to ensuring peace in that country. We know from our own experience that this is a long and thorny path, but one that Iraq will have to take. The foundation for the international community's actions must be the principle that, in assisting Afghanistan and Iraq in combating terrorism, establishing peace and building democracy, we are assisting ourselves.

I believe that there is a need here to unmask any attempt to provide scholarly justification of any sort for international terrorism. I am referring here in particular to the concept of the clash of civilizations, which cannot be thought of as an innocent theoretical exercise.

In that light, this summer, along the shores of our "blue pearl", Lake Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization organized a conference entitled "Eurasia in the twenty-first century: Dialogue of cultures or a conflict of civilizations?" The idea of a conflict of civilizations was firmly condemned at the conference. For my part, I believe that the term "conflict of civilizations" should be erased from the global political lexicon as unfounded theoretically and harmful in practice. I note with satisfaction that, in his statement at this session, President Bush rejected the concept of a conflict of civilizations. The future belongs to the dialogue of cultures and civilizations.

In conclusion, I wish to address the issue of United Nations reform. Kyrgyzstan supports proposals aimed at bringing the Organization ever more closely in line with the realities of the twenty-first century, particularly with respect to the role of the Security Council. In that regard, I believe that the United Nations at its anniversary session can and must decide to include Germany and Japan among the permanent members of the Council. We also support the expansion of the permanent and non-permanent categories of Council membership on the basis of the principle of equal geographic distribution.

The enhancement of the United Nations peacekeeping potential is another positive concept. Kyrgyzstan will continue to respond positively to requests for its personnel in efforts to attain those goals.

Lastly, Kyrgyzstan and other countries of Central Asia, in cooperation with Russia and China, intend to continue to support the international community's efforts to counter international terrorism and to meet other global challenges and threats through active regional measures. Evidence of our resolve is the growing role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Organization.

From this high rostrum, I reaffirm that Kyrgyzstan, in a spirit of unwavering dedication to the principles and purposes of the United Nations, will continue to be a reliable link in the international community's efforts to ensure peace, security and prosperity for all peoples of this planet.

Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Sonatane Tu'a Taumoepeau-Tupou, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Mr. Taumoepeau-Tupou (Tonga): I congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency and know well that we are in excellent hands. I should also like to pay tribute to Mr. Julian Hunte for his excellent stewardship of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

We are enthusiastic at the forthcoming 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action. We see it as an extension and implementation of the commitments agreed to in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and, in particular, in its chapter VII. Whilst the developmental path to Mauritius in January 2005 has been fraught with its own challenges, it is critical to small island developing States that the impetus for that important global review not be lost in its own rhetoric. It is paramount that the outcomes from Mauritius be refined and focused on translating the oft-quoted special case of small island developing States into firm and timely support and global implementation. As such, participation by all member States in the forthcoming preparatory process and in the International Meeting in Mauritius is essential to realizing our development aspirations.

The geographical makeup of small island States puts some of our islands at a disadvantage. That is because economic development has focused on larger islands with large populations, which thereby enjoy a higher per capita income than do other islands of the country. That is true of Tonga, where the main focus of development has been devoted to the larger islands of the three main island groups, but within each of those three groups other islands need further economic development. Three remote islands to the north, known as the Niuas, are disadvantaged by the tyranny of distance and are in fact in closer proximity to Samoa than they are to our own capital. The outlying islands of the Vava'u and Ha'apai groups are less developed than their main islands, while 'Eua to the south-east of Tongatapu has potential but needs targeted inputs. Though we have designated core donors to those islands, their further development will need additional or new resources. So I hope that, in the review of the Barbados Programme of Action, some thought is given to the lot of those living on these disadvantaged islands.

As a developing ocean State, we are vigilant about progress in ocean affairs and law of the sea issues. We consider the valuable contribution made by the meeting of States parties to the Convention on the Law of the Sea and its subsidiary bodies — in particular, the achievements of the International Seabed Authority, to whose mandate a research function should be added, and the work of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf — worthy of mention. Together with the important role of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process, this sets a firm and practical platform for our work during this session.

I am happy to note that the third informal meeting of States parties to the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement has seen firm commitments by certain States Parties to enable the implementation and concrete operation of elements of part VII of the Agreement with special emphasis on and relevance to small island developing States. We continue to encourage other member States to become parties to the Agreement.

We are particularly pleased that the Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean entered into force earlier this year. We consider that special milestone worthy of note in the Assembly's work.

Wanton acts of terrorism continue to test our fortitude as members of the international community. We must remain collectively resolute in our resolve to prevent and vigorously combat the proponents of that evil, and we must be innovative and versatile in our pursuit of meaningful countermeasures and lasting solutions.

We continue to strongly support the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and applaud the recent revitalization of it and its work. Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) remains the basis of domestic measures implemented by my Government, including the submission of country and, where appropriate, regional reports. It is useful to identify areas where financial and technical assistance is necessary to enable stronger compliance by all States in meeting their international obligations.

After eight years of negotiations, Tonga's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) is in the final stages. Bilateral market access agreements on goods and services have been concluded with Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and Panama. Agreement with the United States is outstanding, as it has requested that we accede to the Chemical Harmonization Agreement and the Information Technology Agreement. Although this is an additional burden on us, we do understand that the United States is requesting the same commitments from every acceding country. The working group report has been discussed at informal working parties and so gives rise to cautious optimism that we could conclude the process before the 2005 ministerial meeting.

Tonga needs the understanding and the support of all WTO members as we seek commitments commensurate with the size of our economy and the stage of our development. To be sure, Tonga is not seeking greater market access, but desires security for its trade under a rule-based, multilateral trading system.

Tonga adheres strictly to the "one China" policy and recognizes that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. We welcome the shared principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs and, as such, we consider that delicate and sensitive issues are best dealt with in an across-the-Strait dialogue rather than at international forums.

We welcome the expanding cooperation with China and recognize that its huge market provides a range of commercial, financial and trade possibilities for us and, to that end, Tonga has adopted a "look east" policy. To give effect to its interests in China, Tonga will soon establish a diplomatic presence in Beijing to explore those interests further.

For a decade now, we have exported our squash produce to Japan and, more recently, we have been exporting specially cultivated seaweed to its markets. It is timely that we now explore further forms of cooperation with Japan in the field of fisheries, trade in other produce, financial and investment possibilities, as well as education and training. To pursue those interests, we are giving thought to a possible presence in Tokyo, although such an undertaking will be determined by available financial resources. The policy does not supplant the long-existing warm ties of friendship we enjoy with Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States in the Pacific region, as those friendly ties and a broad range of cooperation are firmly rooted in our policy.

My Government has approved the fourth deployment later in the year of police officers to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Also, approval has been given for the deployment of the third contingent of defence personnel for 2005, in concert with the agreed rotation formula under RAMSI.

We all look forward to the report of the High-Level Panel. Judging from the makeup of the Panel and its formidable credentials, I should think the report and recommendations will set the tone for the constructive engagement of the General Assembly.

The membership of the Security Council ought to be expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories in accordance with the realities of the day and perceptions of tomorrow. We believe that Japan should be a permanent member and that there should be a permanent seat for Africa and another for Latin America.

Five years ago, Tonga was admitted to membership of the United Nations and has since actively participated in United Nations activities. It is now giving favourable consideration to contributing to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Consequently, arrangements for our participation will be discussed further with the United Nations. The scope of our deployment will be fashioned by our available manpower and financial capacity.

Although violence renders an enduring peace elusive, we continue to harbour hopes that a lasting peace can soon be concluded so that a Palestinian State can be established, living side by side with the State of Israel in internationally recognized borders and in peace and security.

Our development has been made possible through domestic resources and also through bilateral and multilateral programmes of assistance, all of which have been highly appreciated. Our major donor partners have been Australia, China, the European Union — with some members providing additional assistance — Japan and New Zealand. The United States provides assistance through its fisheries treaty with the Pacific region and through other avenues. In recent times, India, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia have provided technical assistance. The United Nations Development Programme, the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Global Fund, the World Bank and other financial institutions have provided various forms of assistance and technical expertise. Much of the technical assistance is channelled to combating diabetes and tuberculosis and preventing the spread of the HIV/AIDS. Other assistance has been directed at meeting our Millennium Development Goals and to small community programmes and projects.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Yahia (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to read out the statement of Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia and Chairman of the sixteenth session of the Arab League Council, who had wanted to attend this meeting but was detained by urgent commitments. The statement reads as follows:

> "It is my distinct pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to your sisterly country, the Republic of Gabon, my sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at this session. We wish you every success.
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> "I also wish to express to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, my great appreciation for his excellent management of the proceedings of the previous session.
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> "I also take this opportunity to convey my thanks and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his commendable efforts to promote the role of the Organization and to fulfil its objectives of establishing security and peace throughout the world.
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> "Tunisia reiterates its commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and reaffirms its steady resolve to continue to contribute to all efforts to reform the Organization and to develop its structures, the General Assembly and the Security Council in particular, so that it can remain the guarantor of the application of international law and the consolidation of justice, stability and development throughout the world.
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> "Faced with rising tensions in many regions of the world, the widening development gap between countries and the serious challenges confronting humankind, the international community is called upon to reorganize international relations in accordance with a new vision based on cooperation, solidarity and coexistence among all peoples. That is the approach which we sought to develop at the Summit Conference of the Arab League Council hosted by my country on 22 and 23 May, the current session of which we have the honour of chairing.
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> "In addition to the outcome of the Arab Summit, which represents a qualitative leap in the system of joint Arab action, the Arab States sent a clear message to the international community. In it, they reaffirmed their commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace as a strategic option in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the Arab peace initiative, international legality, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the implementation of the road map. The community of Arab States is determined to intensify its international activities to reactivate the Arab peace initiative and to rally international support for it.
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> "The serious escalation of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel's stubborn imposition of a policy of fait accompli and unilateral measures require the international community to act promptly to end the violence against and provide international protection for the brotherly Palestinian people, to lift the siege imposed on its legitimate leadership, to cease the building of settlements and to recognize the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice declaring the construction of the separation wall illegal and calling for its demolition. We believe that this would help to create conditions conducive to the establishment of a new era of confidence and understanding among all parties in the region in which the peace process can be resumed, the brotherly Palestinian people can recover its legitimate rights and establish its independent State, and Syria and Lebanon can recover all of their occupied territories.
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> "While renewing its commitment to supporting Iraq's national unity and respect for its sovereignty and independence, the community of Arab States stresses the need for the United Nations to assume its vital role in that sisterly country. In the framework of the League of Arab States, we will continue to support international efforts to demonstrate the solidarity of the Arab world with the Iraqi people as our contribution to establishing security and stability in that country and creating conditions conducive to its reconstruction.

"The Arab countries also support the efforts made at the United Nations and regional levels, and in particular by the African Union, to achieve unity, peace and development in the brotherly Sudan. They also welcome the steps taken by the Sudanese Government to honour its commitments under the agreement to re-establish security and stability in Darfur, signed on 3 July 2004 with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

"The Arab Summit was an historic occasion at which the Arab States reaffirmed the fact that finding just solutions to the fundamental problems of the region that have adversely affected world peace and security would reinforce the instincts of its peoples for security and peace, enhance the development process, update and consolidate the principles of human rights and democracy, and promote the role and status of women in society, in conformity with each country's cultural specificities, conditions and abilities, and based on its own free will and commitment to shared humanitarian values.

"Given the Arab States' conviction of the importance of the economic and social dimensions in strengthening the process of building the pan-Arab system, our Arab Summit has decided to establish a common strategy for economic and social action and a plan to fight poverty and reinforce development efforts. In so doing, it has demonstrated its resolve to contribute to implementing the decisions of the Millennium Summit. The Arab States' call for the articulation of a new concept of cooperation- and solidarity-based partnership with all countries of the world consecrates the path of dialogue among cultures and anchors the values of tolerance, understanding and complementarity among them.

"Our States and peoples hope that the international community and the influential parties will step up their endeavours to settle the pending issues in the region, support the efforts of countries to upgrade their economies, and promote their development and social programmes in the framework of cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the League of Arab States.

"Tunisia is eager to contribute to the promotion of joint Arab action and seeks to give new impetus to regional cooperation. In that context, we and our brother leaders of the Maghreb States are seeking to reactivate the Maghreb Union, which is an irreversible strategic choice and a legitimate aspiration, shared by all the peoples of the region, to greater complementarity and solidarity. Our country is also eager to continue contributing to building the structures of the African Union, strengthening the foundations of security and stability in Africa, and establishing economic and social cooperation among African countries. That will effectively help our countries to achieve integration in the march towards prosperity and progress and to create genuine partnerships with regional groupings throughout the world.

"At the Mediterranean level, the 'five plus five' summit involving the Maghreb countries and European countries of the southern Mediterranean, held in Tunis in December 2003, has made a fresh start for cooperation and solidarity-based partnership among them in the context of establishing security and stability and of achieving economic complementarity, cultural and social communication, and constructive political dialogue. Serving as coordinator of the community of Arab States within the Euro-Mediterranean process, Tunisia strives to inject more efficiency and vitality into the process so as to consolidate the foundations of security, stability and development within the Euro-Mediterranean area.

"The World Solidarity Fund for poverty eradication, created on the basis of a Tunisian proposal of 1999 and adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2002, reflects Tunisia's ongoing commitment to anchoring the principles of justice, solidarity and sustainable development in the world, based on our successful pioneering national experience in that field over many years. We believe that the Fund, which has become a United Nations mechanism, requires all members of the international community, including Governments, civil society and private sectors, to pool their efforts and swiftly mobilize the financial resources necessary to activate it.

"In that context, we suggest the proclamation of 20 December of each year as the world day for the fight against poverty, in commemoration of the date of the General Assembly's adoption of the resolution establishing the Fund and in order to enshrine the concept of solidarity as a permanent universal value in international relations. We also welcome any initiative in support of the activation of the Fund. In that regard, we take special note of the initiative of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Federal Republic of Brazil.

"Tunisia's sustained efforts to provide optimum conditions for the hosting of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society on 16 to 18 November 2005 are also being undertaken in that context. We called for the convening of such a summit in 1998, based on our conviction that, today more than ever before, our world needs to establish a solidarity-based digital partnership, allowing all countries to be integrated into the international information society. In that way, we hope to achieve a more just and balanced approach as a strong development and cultural bridge between the countries of the world, in fulfilment of the goals and principles of the Millennium Summit.

"I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate my earlier invitation to heads of State and Government, to representatives of civil society and the private sector and to other international organizations, extended at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva in December 2003, to participate actively in the Tunis Summit in order to ensure its success and to achieve the prosperity and well-being of all humankind.

"The General Assembly's adoption of the Tunisian proposal to proclaim 2005 the International Year of Sport and Physical Education was a recognition of the importance of those two activities in strengthening the bonds of friendship, cooperation and rapprochement among peoples and in further disseminating peace and development throughout the world. We are convinced that all countries recognize the noble dimensions of the proclamation and will spare no effort to formalize it within their national programmers next year.

"The increasing danger of the phenomenon of terrorism in our times requires greater international coordination in resisting that scourge and averting its threats by treating its root causes, finding just solutions to several outstanding international problems, and curbing poverty, exclusion and marginalization in the world. Tunisia is convinced that international relations can prosper and develop only in a climate of dialogue, entente and solidarity, eschewing fanaticism, extremism and the dangers of discord and warfare and in a context of justice, mutual respect and equitable cooperation among individuals, groups and peoples. Thus, security, peace and stability may prevail throughout the world and humankind may look to the future with the utmost confidence, optimism and ambition."

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Wangchuk (Bhutan): On behalf of the delegation of Bhutan, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to your important post. I assure you of my delegation's support and cooperation as you guide the work of this important body for the year. We are confident that, with your vast experience and able leadership, our deliberations will be productive. May I commend Mr. Julian R. Hunte for his stewardship and contribution to the work of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The task before the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly is daunting, given the array of issues and challenges facing the international community. Among them is the issue of reform of the United Nations. In that regard, the General Assembly's resolutions on the revitalization of its work and the reform initiatives in other organs and agencies are timely and welcome, as they will serve to ensure the United Nations continued relevance and effectiveness in a rapidly changing world. My delegation looks forward to the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change set up by the Secretary-General to examine the current challenges to peace and security.

Much of the ongoing debate on United Nations reforms has justifiably centred on the reform of the Security Council as the organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. In a world torn by old and new conflicts, the Security Council must evolve in order to remain effective and to enjoy the confidence of all member States. Its composition must change to reflect the wider membership of the United Nations and the new geopolitical and economic realities of the present-day world. Bhutan supports the call for an expanded Security Council through increased membership of both the permanent and non-permanent categories. Among others, Bhutan strongly believes that India and Japan, in view of the important roles they play in international affairs, are pre-eminently qualified for permanent membership in an expanded Council.

The toll of innocent human beings falling prey to terrorism continues to mount by the day. Gruesome acts of terrorism in different regions of the world, including the recent brutal killing of schoolchildren in Beslan and the cold-blooded murder of Nepalese and other innocent people in Iraq and elsewhere, have raised the level of horror to new heights. We strongly condemn those senseless killings. Even my country has not been spared the scourge. Having exhausted all peaceful means to prevail upon the heavily armed foreign militant groups from north-eastern India to leave our territory, the Royal Government was compelled to use force to remove them in mid-December 2003. Most recently, two people were killed and 27 injured by a bomb blast in a marketplace in a border town in southern Bhutan.

There is an urgent need to take concerted action to fight terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Every nation gathered here, by having signed the Charter of the United Nations, ascribes to the universal code that the methods which terrorists employ to achieve their aims, especially the targeting and killing of innocent civilians, cannot be justified.

Conflicts and crisis situations continue to disrupt the political stability, security and socio-economic well-being of millions around the world. Many such conflicts are fuelled by conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. Recognizing that interrelationship, the international community has taken numerous initiatives in recent years. Several major conferences have been convened, including the Millennium Summit, that have provided a comprehensive set of time-bound targets to be achieved in order to secure a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.

However, those targets remain distant for many and the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider among and within nations. The Global Monitoring Report 2004 of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund indicates that economic growth in many developing countries remains below the level considered necessary to reach the Millennium Development Goals. If the Goals are to be achieved by the target date, the report states, all parties urgently need to do much more. The Monterrey Consensus reinforced the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and emphasized the roles of all parties involved in the process of financing for development. While developing countries have to accelerate reforms, developed countries must provide more aid, foreign direct investment, debt relief and more open access to their markets.

It is against that background that my delegation welcomes the 2005 high-level plenary meeting to review the integrated follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations conferences and summits. My delegation hopes that the review will lead to further concrete action by all stakeholders. Furthermore, as a landlocked, least developed country, my delegation hopes to see the issues and challenges identified in the Almaty and Brussels Programmes of Action receive the highest priority during the review.

May I mention that the Royal Government of Bhutan, under the leadership of His Majesty the King and guided by the development philosophy of gross national happiness, has been making concerted efforts to ensure the all-round development of the country and to realize the agreed goals of the various international conferences, in particular the Millennium Summit. I am pleased to report that, with the continued support of our development partners, Bhutan is hopeful of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In that regard, I take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of the Royal Government and people of Bhutan to the United Nations and other donors for their contributions to the development of my country.

As I conclude my statement, I would like to pay tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his strong leadership and relentless efforts to advance the cause of peace, development and security. We will continue to benefit from his vision and leadership for the next two years. As he leaves his post at the end of 2006, our work to find a suitable replacement to lead the United Nations has to begin soon and in earnest.

My delegation believes that, in keeping with the principle of equitable geographical representation, and in consideration of Asia's being the most populous continent with the largest regional grouping of 55 members in the United Nations, a Secretary-General from Asia would be both timely and appropriate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Biossey Kokou Tozoun, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Togolese Republic.

Mr. Tozoun (Togo) (*spoke in French*): In expressing to you, Sir, our great pride at seeing an eminent representative of the Group of African States preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, I wish to offer you, on behalf of Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadema, President of the Togolese Republic, and of the Government and the people of Togo, which it is my great honour to represent, our sincere wishes for your success in fulfilling your mandate.

We also congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan on his dynamic and unequivocal work at the head of our Organization.

The present session of the General Assembly is being held at a time when international peace and security continue to be seriously threatened, requiring our common Organization fully to shoulder its role and mission with even greater determination and bolder initiatives. Indeed, we are living in a world of precarious balances arising from our collective inability to establish genuine peace and shared well-being in the framework of international legitimacy.

In Africa, the legitimate aspirations of people to lasting peace, in particular in those countries and regions where that peace is being sorely tested, have yet to be achieved.

In Côte d'Ivoire, after numerous short-lived hopes have been dashed, the implementation of the Accra III Agreement remains today the sole hope for the restoration of peace and stability in that country. The Togolese Head of State, who from the very beginning of the crisis committed himself to the path of dialogue and reconciliation, will continue to be involved in the peaceful settlement of that fratricidal conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, recently arisen obstacles to the peace process, which is intended to lead to the holding in 2005 of elections for the creation of new institutions, have required the international community to spare no effort in maintaining the gains won through the costly deployment of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and in launching, whenever necessary, such operations as Artemis to nip in the bud any impulse towards a resumption of combat wherever it may arise. The Government of Togo therefore unreservedly supports the Secretary-General's proposal significantly to increase the number of MONUC personnel.

It is to be hoped that the international conference on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region, to be held in November, will be the appropriate framework for finding lasting solutions to the problems of insecurity and instability that continue to weaken relationships among States of the region and to jeopardize the emergence of a climate of good-neighbourliness and mutual understanding.

In the Sudan, regarding the tragedy unfolding in Darfur, the international community must urgently assist the Government of that country and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement to consolidate the peace process through the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement. In that regard, the international community must provide consistent support to the African Union's peace operation.

In Burundi, Liberia and Somalia in particular, the outburst of solidarity and renewed interest which the international community continues to show in the restoration of peace and the recovery of those countries, battered by long years of war, should be accompanied by more adequate financial and logistical assistance. Togo, for its part, will continue to contribute to conflict and crisis resolution in Africa and to support the various United Nations peacekeeping operations by supplying military contingents or observers, as it is currently doing in Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, Liberia and Haiti.

The prevailing situations in the world, particularly in Iraq and the Middle East, are a source of major concern. In Iraq, the restoration of full sovereignty to the Iraqi people and the recognition that the United Nations has an important role to play in rebuilding the country should give every element of Iraqi society the opportunity to work with resolve to build a stable and prosperous country free of all violence.

In the Middle East, the ongoing escalation of violence between the State of Israel and the Palestinian State may definitively compromise the continuation of the peace process and the implementation of the various agreements that have been signed. In that respect, the international community and the Quartet must strive to persuade the two protagonists to avoid unilateral action and to return to the negotiating table on the basis of the road map and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Furthermore, we wish to emphasize, again with respect to crisis issues, that post-conflict situations clearly demonstrate the importance of providing adequate financing, not only for humanitarian assistance but also for other vital programmes to promote peace and sustainable development. There is thus a need for the financing of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants and other long-term instruments for ensuring peace — such as education, health care and job creation for young people — to be made a priority of post-conflict peace-building.

In the same context, the troubling financial situation of the three Regional Centres for peace and disarmament call for more attention from the Assembly if they are to enjoy the financial resources necessary to fulfil their mandates harmoniously. In that regard, and on the basis of the relevant Secretary-General's reports, the delegation of Togo firmly believes that it is high time for the General Assembly seriously to review the financing of the Regional Centres in order to provide them with adequate financial resources under the Organization's regular budget. In so doing, the General Assembly would demonstrate its genuine support for the Organization's goals in the area of arms control and disarmament and its appreciation of the active role played to date by the Centres. For its part, my country, which hosts the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, will do its utmost to ensure the Centre's continuity and long-term viability.

Terrorism is the other major danger of our times because it continues seriously to threaten our States and is thus a scourge in the face of which failure to act effectively means giving way to the forces of evil. Having endured terrorism in the past, Togo once again condemns the heinous terrorist attacks perpetrated recently around the world and keenly hopes that more decisive action will be undertaken to eradicate that disease of the human conscience.

From that perspective, while it is up to each State to take the measures necessary to strengthen security within its own borders, we must strive above all to enhance regional and international cooperation among States and to ensure that the poor States can enjoy adequate assistance in the implementation of effective national mechanisms to combat terrorism.

Economic and social development is a corollary of peace and security. We all recall that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Millennium Summit was convened here in this very Hall. Following the Summit, at which the problems of poverty and development were debated, the heads of State and Government adopted the Millennium Declaration, an unprecedented affirmation of international solidarity in which the rich and poor countries together undertook firm commitments whereby they forcefully reaffirmed their will to reduce by half, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's population touched by poverty. World leaders voiced the hope at that time that other major meetings also held early in the new millennium would serve as a framework for the birth of genuine partnership between the countries of the North and those of the South.

Several years later, however, we note with regret that the Millennium Development Goals have been hard to achieve. Indeed, the necessary resources to finance sustainable development and to combat poverty and hunger in the developing countries have not been mobilized and, contrary to expectations, only a small number of developing countries have been able to make progress in the elimination of poverty.

The critical economic situation in Africa requires a collective awakening and introspection. What has happened to our myriad commitments? What has happened to our many promises?

Regarding the rules of international trade, which remain unfavourable to the poor countries; regarding the long-awaited debt relief; regarding the fact that the goal of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product for official development assistance has been met by only a small fraction of donor countries, we may well ask ourselves what happened to the solidarity so loudly proclaimed at the Millennium Summit.

Last year's failure of the World Trade Organization trade negotiations in Cancún — designed to settle the critical issues of eliminating agricultural subsidies and providing access to the markets of the industrialized world for the products of the countries of the South — highlighted yet again the North-South division and evoked real fears for the future of the multilateral trade system.

On the basis of those questions and concerns, the delegation of Togo reaffirms the need for all international partners to reflect in deeds the political will they proclaimed at the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development so as to give new impetus to efforts to increase official development assistance, to provide debt relief and equitable access to markets, to protect the environment, and to combat malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

2005 will be a crucial year for our Organization. Indeed, in 2005, we shall engage in in-depth consideration of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. In 2005, we shall hold a high-level debate on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. In that regard, we need to bear in mind that the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly set specific goals to be met for 2003 and 2005 towards the eradication of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Above all, 2005 will be the year of the high-level plenary meeting to engage in a comprehensive review of progress made in the implementation of all of the commitments undertaken in the Millennium Declaration and at the major United Nations conferences and summit meetings in the economic and social fields.

We therefore await those meetings with interest. They will give us the opportunity to reaffirm our political commitment to building a world of greater solidarity and prosperity in order to give hope once more to that significant segment of the world's population that lives on less than $1 a day, suffers from hunger and malnutrition and has no access to drinking water.

The peace and economic and social development that we desire for our countries cannot be achieved without the effective participation of peoples in managing public affairs. Democracy in Togo, based on a multi-party system and the rule of law, has become a vibrant reality, inter alia, through the adoption of important legislative and administrative texts and the establishment of virtually every institution provided for by the Constitution. With faith and determination, the Government of Togo, under the impetus of the Head of State, is striving to build a genuinely democratic society that also takes the sociological realities of our country into account.

In order to complete its task, the Government has declared its openness to any constructive contribution from the national political class and civilian society, as well as from our development partners. In that context, on 14 April it opened consultations with the European Union, in conformity with article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement of partnership linking that organization to the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States. At the outset of the consultations, the Government endorsed a number of commitments whose implementation is currently near completion and should ultimately lead to a better foundation of democratic culture and the consolidation of the rule of law.

The Government intends to strive to bring the consultations to a successful conclusion, the ultimate objective of which is the resumption of cooperation between the European Union and Togo. The political zeal of the Togolese authorities — reflected in the implementation of an ongoing inclusive national dialogue; the adoption of a press and communications code; the drafting of an improved electoral code and a financing law for political parties; and the decision taken by the Head of State on 11 August to release more than 500 common-law prisoners — is a guarantee of the Government's resolve to create favourable conditions for the citizens of Togo to enjoy their fundamental rights, and in particular their political and economic rights.

We take this opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to all our development partners to assist the Government of Togo in the process of strengthening and consolidating democracy and the rule of law.

I cannot conclude without returning to the recurrent issue of United Nations reform. The Government of Togo wishes to propose that bold decisions be taken at this session to accelerate the process of reform of the system, and of the Security Council in particular, so that the issue can be more than a mirage. Indeed, the numerous challenges confronting today's world require a strengthened and more effective Security Council, which only a more representative and more democratic membership can ensure. In that respect, Africa deserves an appropriate place within that vital United Nations body.

The Security Council must therefore be enlarged in both the permanent and non-permanent memberships so as to meet the democratic requirements of our times and to allow various groups of countries to provide their valuable assistance in achieving the objectives of our Organization, which include peace and security, working for freedom and democracy, guaranteeing global prosperity through free and equitable international trade, preserving a healthy environment and creating stable international relations based on dialogue. If we truly seek to achieve all this, we must give our common Organization the resources commensurate with doing so.

May this session serve to strengthen cooperation among our States and peoples and assist us in consolidating peace and in achieving security and lasting development for all.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Timothy Harris, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Education of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Mr. Harris (Saint Kitts and Nevis): I am pleased to welcome and congratulate you, Sir, and the Republic of Gabon through you, for allowing us to share your experience and expertise on the occasion of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I must convey to Mr. Julian Hunte, Foreign Minister of Saint Lucia, my country's gratitude for his hard work and memorable contribution to this Organization over the past year.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis reaffirms its strong support for and commitment to the praiseworthy, attainable Millennium Development Goals. Their stated objectives are fundamental and have long been incorporated into my country's national human development agenda.

For decades, before the Millennium Development Goals were agreed upon, Saint Kitts and Nevis had instituted compulsory primary and secondary education, which may explain our achievement of a literacy rate of 97.8 per cent. We in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are very proud of our achievements in the field of education. We owe much of that success to our coherent system of education and also to the University of the West Indies, whose academic credentials continue to amaze and evolve to meet the needs of our people. We invite fellow United Nations Member States to explore that resource in the Caribbean so their citizens can pursue higher education in that great institution of learning and in the most peaceful and pristine of multicultural settings.

It is easy to become excited when I speak of our efforts in addressing the issue of women in development, but we will not let down our guard. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, we have recognized and benefited from gender equality and the empowerment of women. It may be recalled that Saint Kitts and Nevis was among the first in this hemisphere to create a Ministry Of Women's Affairs.

Equally important to the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis is winning the war against poverty. We remain steadfast in our efforts to eliminate poverty, which is not simply a noble ideal. It is a practical, achievable objective and, by God, it is the right thing to do. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, in the last seven years, we have endured social and economic dislocations in the wake of several catastrophic natural disasters, 9/11 and the downturns in the global economy. Nonetheless, with due care and attention to prudent fiscal and monetary management, we are investing in the socio-economic development of our country and continue to place people first in all that we do.

My Government has invested greatly in our national health system, supported by the construction of a modern hospital and the professional development of health care workers. We believe that this will improve the quality of and access to health care for nationals and visitors alike. Our continued efforts to build a healthy nation are consistent with our resolve to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health.

Our capital project investments have improved the existing distribution networks to satisfy demand and to better extend service coverage for potable water throughout the islands of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Our road improvement and maintenance programmes have resurfaced miles of road and improved drainage throughout the twin island Federation. The improvement of the tourism product has generated several new jobs consistent with my Government's people-focused agenda. It has allowed us to depend less on an agriculture-based economy, which continues to suffer from Government subsidies offered to farmers in large countries. Such subsidies make it more difficult for small economies like mine to compete. Our capacity to compete is further undermined by the recent unilateral decision of the European Union to reduce the price of sugar by more than 30 per cent.

Despite these challenges, we continue to press on, mindful of the need to preserve the environment. Saint Kitts and Nevis are two beautiful islands faced with the geographic reality of being located in the hurricane corridor. We witness the cost of beach and coastal erosion resulting from rising sea levels and hurricanes. Integrating environmentally sustainable policies into our development agenda has been a real challenge. However, our determination to protect and preserve the islands' patrimony by adopting environmentally friendly programmes is imperative.

At this juncture, I need to emphasize the current situation facing small island developing States. All small island developing States lack the economy of scale to overcome their vulnerabilities on their own. We are extremely vulnerable unless we form geographical partnerships, as CARICOM has done. That, however, does not exempt us from the vulnerabilities that we face every day. Geographical partnership does allow for a quick response in the event of adversity.

My delegation urges the international community to accept the concept of vulnerability, leading to a vulnerability index that can be appropriately applied to small island developing States. Grenada's devastation within three hours of being struck by hurricane Ivan dramatizes for us how a generation of development progress can be wiped out in a small vulnerable nation. There is a pressing need for a global development fund to assist small island developing States in recovery following national disasters.

Pragmatic and productive partnerships are the most effective vehicle available to the international community to tackle the multitude of problems we face. We speak of important issues, such as democracy, globalization, terrorism, poverty eradication, human development and the spread of infectious disease, as if they were completely disconnected. The goal of human development on any scale is best achieved by recognizing the interconnectedness of our lives, our economies and our policies. That imposes an obligation to develop common strategies, partnerships and policy approaches that accept and address the intrinsic linkages among the problems facing nation States.

I submit that the Pan-Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS is the first and only regional mechanism created to deal with the pandemic in a multinational way. Our regional cooperation has led to reductions in the cost of antiretroviral drugs from $20,000 per person per year to $200 per patient per year. We have also been successful in negotiating reduced prices for other important pharmaceutical drugs. That experience speaks to the value of partnership and cooperation. We believe that networks are the most effective means of problem solving. We praise the efforts of the Global Fund and the United Nations for their work in mobilizing additional resources to treat people living with HIV/AIDS and to fight the spread of the disease.

The idea of fighting HIV/AIDS only through faith simplifies the human condition and suggests a misunderstanding of the nature and scope of the disease. My Government insists that a pragmatic policy approach to fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS is as fundamental to good governance as is the holding of free and fair elections. Good governance means Governments listening to and caring for their citizens. Good governance implies that leaders must lead with moral courage and take bold and sometimes controversial steps in the public interests.

Good governance means placing the United Nations at the centre of our international interaction, in accordance with and in full respect for the Charter. Good governance requires respect for every country's right to choose its own course, consistent with its own laws and the will of its people. Good governance is not simply about whether we ostracize a country if its policies run counter to our national agenda. It should be about creating better understanding, cooperation and partnership and building bridges of friendship. Good governance suggests to us in Saint Kitts and Nevis that Governments abide by and commit themselves to internationally recognized standards and principles and do not discard them when it becomes expedient. Good governance entails holding everyone to the same standard and not raising the bar for some countries and lowering it for others.

Good governance should propel us to recognize the fact that nearly 23 million people in the Republic of

China on Taiwan are essentially in a diplomatic black hole, alienated from our international discourse. Good governance requires all peace-loving nations to urge both sides of the Taiwan Straits not only to commit to, but also to engage in constructive dialogue and preventive diplomacy. Good governance behooves us to support the hard work of the leaders and people of the Republic of China on Taiwan to comply with and work within the framework of international law. Good governance says to us in Saint Kitts and Nevis that a people committed to the rule of law and democracy and willing to invest in human development at home and abroad should never be excluded from the fraternity of nations.

In addition, CARICOM takes great pride in our parliamentary system of Government and our solid democracies from a centuries-old tradition. Our history teaches us that good governance and human development are indivisible. Where representative democracy, democratic institution-building, freedom of expression and the protection of human rights have not flourished, human development has suffered. Where Governments have failed to respect the will of the people, human development has faltered. Although CARICOM faces great limitations and challenges owing to the absence of natural and financial resources, we have managed to build credible democratic institutions, a reliable judicial system and lasting democracies in which the transition from incumbent Governments to opposition parties passes without incident. We are ready to share these experiences with the rest of the world.

In conclusion, for decades countries and academics have questioned the viability of small States. History, though, has witnessed not only our viability, but also that we are a dependable beacon of hope for others, be they large or small. We live in an interconnected world where national political decisions in one corner of the world have devastating consequences thousands of miles away.

We must therefore of necessity become our brothers' keepers. In that vein, we call on Member States to lend their support to the international meeting to review the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, scheduled to be held in Mauritius in January 2005.

Finally, I would like to repeat my call that partnership must trump nationalism and that multilateralism must transcend unilateralism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Moctar Ouane, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset warmly to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and to assure you and the other members of the Bureau, whom I also congratulate, of the full support of the delegation of Mali as you carry out your mission.

I also wish to pay tribute to the dedication of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to thank him for his tireless efforts in the service of the United Nations.

Six days ago, Mali commemorated in its own way the forty-fourth anniversary of its independence. From this high rostrum, the most symbolic of all, I wish to recall the efforts of my country to build, under the leadership of Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic and Head of State, a democratic, stable and prosperous Mali asserting its place in the concert of nations.

For several weeks now, our country and others of the North and West African regions, have been stricken by an unprecedented locust infestation. As President Amadou Toumani Touré stressed in his message to the nation on 22 September, the magnitude and speed of the infestation have surpassed the most pessimistic projections. The catastrophic effects of that insect plague on the upcoming harvest and on our vegetation are a true threat to the livelihood of the millions of men and women thus exposed to famine.

The Government of the Republic of Mali is actively working to suppress the scourge, above all through a national mobilization that has brought teams, brigades and village communities to work in the field, and with the support of the international community, and in particular to brotherly African countries. I reiterate here my country's gratitude to them all. I also wish firmly to say, however, that, faced with the insect plague and in order to ensure the food security of infested countries, including Mali, we have a shared responsibility to launch and strengthen short-, medium-

and long-term international mobilization. We must act, act quickly and act effectively.

Questions related to international peace and security continue to be a source of concern to us. In the past year we have seen crises and conflicts multiply throughout the world. I would like, in particular, to recall the situation in West Africa and Mali's initiatives to contribute to the settlement of the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, whose subregional repercussions are considerable and fraught with consequences for peace and stability in West Africa.

In this regard, the so-called Bamako II meeting made it possible to establish the conditions for the success of the Accra III high-level meeting. I forcefully echo the assertion of President Amadou Toumani Touré that Mali will continue to support peace and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire: peace for the people of Côte d'Ivoire, and peace for all of the foreigners who live in that brotherly neighbouring country.

Here I would mention Mali's participation in the peacekeeping missions of the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Haiti.

Furthermore, Mali's commitment to international peace and security is at the root of our country's action to make the Sahelo-Saharan area a focal point of development and stability. This was especially evident during the Malian presidency of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States.

Mali is also deeply concerned by the situation in the Middle East: measures to close off Palestinian territories, arbitrary arrests, extrajudiciary executions, the destruction of property, land seizures, lack of respect for resolutions adopted by the international community and the siege imposed upon President Arafat. Those actions do not help to establish true peace in that part of the world. Mali, which has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people, urgently appeals to the members of the Quartet to restore dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with a view to a just, equitable and lasting settlement of a conflict which has gone on too long.

International terrorism is today another challenge to international peace and security. We have seen this phenomenon on all continents, making it abundantly clear that terrorism has neither homeland nor religion. That is why the international community must display steadfast political will in combating terrorism by, inter alia, strengthening the available legal arsenal, including mechanisms for cooperation and technical assistance. Beyond this, we must tackle the root causes of the phenomenon, which include poverty, massive human rights violations, intolerance, injustice and impunity from prosecution.

The question of small arms and light weapons is also a primary concern for us. Mali has made a significant contribution in this area by developing initiatives at the subregional, regional and international levels. In this regard, Mali is striving to transform the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa into a convention. We further believe that the international community must now resolutely engage in the establishment of a binding legal instrument on marking, registering and tracing small arms and light weapons.

The situation of children in armed conflicts is also a source of concern for my country. We fully support the recommendations contained in the report of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (E/CN.4/2004/70), and call for the effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1539 (2004). Along the same lines, Mali is working within the Human Security Network to keep this question among the priorities of our Organization.

In order to effectively prevent and manage these situations of crisis and conflict — that is, to preserve and guarantee international peace and security — the international community must work for an international order that is based on the rule of law, and for a United Nations whose legitimacy is strengthened. Thus, we welcome the establishment of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, and we anxiously await its conclusions.

The question of development is, and must remain, a priority issue on the international agenda, and thus we welcome the decision to hold a plenary meeting in 2005 devoted to follow-up of the outcome of the Millennium Summit, and to a comprehensive and coordinated follow-up and implementation of documents from the major conferences and summit meetings organized by the United Nations on economic and social topics. We hope that that meeting will enable us to conduct an objective and candid review of the way in which commitments have been met, including the progress achieved and obstacles remaining in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Defeating poverty is a major objective for the Government of the Republic of Mali. As part of that endeavour, the adoption in 2002, and the implementation, of a strategic framework, has made it possible to achieve important results in the areas of education, health, rural development and basic infrastructure. I take this opportunity to express Mali's support for the initiative launched by Presidents Jacques Chirac and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, which led to the New York Declaration on Action Against Hunger and Poverty adopted on 20 September 2004.

On trade negotiations, Mali attaches great importance to the round of trade negotiations under way within the World Trade Organization (WTO): the Doha development round. We hope that those negotiations will lead to an economic system which will enable all countries, especially developing countries, to fully maximize their potential. We hope to see a true breakthrough in agricultural negotiations, which should lead to the elimination of subsidies and other production and export support mechanisms, particularly with respect to cotton. Indeed, cotton is one of the commodities where we, African producer countries, offer true comparative advantages, since production costs are one fifth those in developed countries. At present, however, our countries are seriously harmed by production and export subsidies for cotton.

For that reason, we reaffirm our opposition to subsidy policies which undermine free market competition, lead to overproduction and lower prices on the international market and prevent our agriculture from getting off the ground.

That is why Mali is also calling for the gradual elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as the implementation of measures on the free movement of people, goods and services. We are pleased with the European Union's commitment to facilitate the integration of least developed countries within the multilateral trading system, including through the adoption in April 2004 of an action plan for agriculture that includes a proposal for an Africa-Europe partnership on cotton.

The AIDS pandemic is progressing at such an alarming rate that, in addition to its health repercussions, it has today become a problem for economic and social development, especially in Africa. That is why we must implement, urgently and in full, the commitments that we undertook in 2001 so that we can mobilize the necessary energy and resources to effectively fight the scourge. Mali has set up a multisectoral programme to fight HIV/AIDS at a cost of $150 million, or 73 billion CFA francs. The implementation of that programme will make it possible to distribute antiretroviral drugs to patients free of charge, as well as to provide necessary impetus to the information and awareness campaign with a view to prevention. Pilot laboratories for screening and counselling will be established throughout the country, and small and medium-sized businesses for social outreach will be set up, thus providing jobs for young people.

With regard to the situation of people with disabilities, Mali is pleased with the negotiations that are under way with a view to elaborating a convention to protect their rights and dignity. We are convinced that the adoption of such an instrument would establish a framework for improved social and economic integration for people with disabilities, allowing them to fully participate in the development efforts of their respective societies.

I would like to conclude in the same vein as I began — by emphatically reaffirming the faith that Mali has in the United Nations, whose purposes and principles, set out almost 60 years ago, remain deeply meaningful and highly relevant. It is true that recently the Organization's capacity and credibility have been seriously undermined. It is therefore all the more important that we carry out a thorough reform of the Organization and revitalize its main bodies. Mali welcomes the important progress that has been achieved in the context of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. The reorganization of the work of the Main Committees, the strengthening of the role of the Bureau and the improvement in working methods will certainly result in the greater effectiveness of this important body. I would like to pay tribute, Sir, to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for the remarkable work that he accomplished in that respect.

Mali shares the common African position that Security Council reform is a necessary — indeed, a priority — task if we are to strengthen the capacities and the credibility of that important body. The Council must be more representative and legitimate. Its composition should reflect the realities of today's world and be expanded in both categories of membership, with particular account being taken of the representation of Africa.

The people of the world have placed their hope in the United Nations, and they expect, in return, greater peace, security, democracy, development and solidarity. As the community of nations, we have the means to achieve those goals, thanks to our collective awareness and the safeguarding of the values we all share: democracy, respect for the rule of law, the primacy of human rights, the preservation of the environment and the protection of future generations from the scourge of war.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Mr. Mesfin (Ethiopia): Allow me to extend to you warm congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I would like to assure you of our fullest cooperation as you discharge the heavy responsibility bestowed upon you. I have no doubt that both Gabon and Africa will be proud of the leadership that I know you will provide at this session.

I would also like to commend your predecessor for his invaluable contribution to the success of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

We continue to be deeply grateful to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the great work that he has been doing in a variety of areas and at various levels. We are grateful to him for doing whatever is humanly possible at the international level to protect the integrity of the United Nations and to defend the rule of law. At the level of Africa, we appreciate his commitment to the creation of the political and economic conditions to generate hope for the revival of the continent.

Never before have we in Africa been as determined and as resolute in our attempt to change for the better the economic and social conditions on our continent and to create the right climate for peace and stability.

That is what the transformation of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union (AU) signifies and what the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) symbolizes. NEPAD's Peer Review Mechanism is a vivid demonstration of Africa's commitment to good and accountable governance.

The renewed vigour with which we in Africa have begun to be proactive in the area of peace and stability within the framework of the Peace and Security Council of the AU is, indeed, a promising beginning. But despite the efforts being made by Africa, the progress that we have made so far has been modest and thus insufficient to bring about hope for the future of the continent.

Part of the explanation for that is obvious. There is just not sufficient support internationally to make it possible for Africa to meet the economic challenges that it is facing. Terms of trade have continued to militate against Africa's development. Moreover, no substantial progress has been made to relieve many in Africa of the debt burden.

It is the combination of all of those factors that has created serious doubts about the ability of many in Africa to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is our hope that those trends will be reversed and that the promises made in the Millennium Declaration fulfilled.

At the end of the day, nations must assume responsibility for their future, for their development and for their peace and stability. Ethiopia has no illusions in that regard. We realize fully that, in the final analysis, it is what Ethiopians do that will shape and determine our future. It is that conviction that is the basis for the various activities currently under way in our country.

With respect to issues of development, the primary task for us is the fight against poverty and ensuring food security for our people. A nation as diverse as Ethiopia can countenance no other form of governance than democratic governance. As such, the very survival of Ethiopia requires good governance and the democratic handling of differences, as a matter not only of preference but of prudence. Peace and stability in Ethiopia hinge on the deepening of democracy in the country.

It is precisely for that reason, and with a view to making up for lost time, that at present there is no greater imperative for Ethiopia than the fostering of peace and stability in our country and in the region of which Ethiopia is a part.

It is that same logic which governs Ethiopia's position on the peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Let there be no doubt that Ethiopia wants to put its crisis with Eritrea behind it. Our conviction is that both peoples would be mistaken to see the other as an enemy. The truth is that both have one common enemy — poverty and backwardness.

It is, indeed, regrettable that after so much bloodshed it has become difficult for Ethiopia and Eritrea to formally complete the peace process because of complications that have been created in connection with the implementation of some aspects of the decision of the Eritrea/Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). I said, "some aspects of the decision" of the EEBC because, when the chips are down, the obstacles to a breakthrough in the peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea involve a controversy surrounding the demarcation of no more than 15 per cent of a common boundary which is, altogether, more than 1,000 kilometres long.

Let me be very clear. Ethiopia is prepared to do whatever is humanly possible for peace. There is no greater priority for us than ensuring peace in our country and stable and mutually beneficial relations with all our neighbours. That is precisely why we have reiterated that we are ready to dialogue with Eritrea with a view to finding a win-win solution to the current stalemate faced by both countries.

Dialogue and normalization of relations between the two countries is not a favour that either party does for the other, or for the international community. Rather, it is an obligation that both countries have, inasmuch as all other alternatives are ruled out by international law and by the Algiers Agreement.

The promotion of durable peace between the two countries and the call for the permanent cessation of military hostilities between the two parties are the twin pillars of the Algiers Agreement. Ethiopia is convinced that the implementation of some aspects of the Boundary Commission's observations on demarcation is not in the interest of peace between the two countries and will not advance the major objectives of the Algiers Agreement, nor will it advance the cause of peace in our subregion.

It is under those circumstances that Ethiopia has felt that there is only one rational way out of the impasse — dialogue, an open-ended dialogue on all issues dividing Ethiopia and Eritrea, including on boundary demarcation with a view to finding an amicable and a mutually acceptable way out of the deadlock and a modus vivendi that would form the basis for the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Eritrea, however, is of a different mind. It continues to be preoccupied with the hope of getting the Security Council to impose sanctions on Ethiopia and with the satisfaction that it would derive from such an outcome. Eritrea should be made to realize that that is unlikely to happen. Not because Eritrea is not big enough to have its way, but because the idea is too inappropriate and too unrealistic. Formality aside — and Eritrea's oft-heard refrain of "final and binding" notwithstanding — no fair-minded person can forget what happened in May 1998 and up through May 2000, and what the OAU said about Badme and its environs.

But talking about the past is not going to help Ethiopia or Eritrea. The two countries cannot continue spending so much time on their preoccupation with each other. That will leave no time for thinking about their future and the future of their hungry and destitute peoples.

There is one other important point that Eritrea should not be allowed to continue misleading the international community about. Nowhere in the whole text of the Algiers Agreement of December 2000 is a provision made for any entity — including the Security Council and the AU — to enforce a court decision. That omission is deliberate, not accidental. Achieving peace and implementing the demarcation of the common boundary between the two countries is primarily the responsibility of Ethiopia and Eritrea, a point that has been repeated in various resolutions by the Security Council.

Let me close the issue by reiterating one fundamental point. Ethiopia is committed to peace with Eritrea and to the removal of obstacles to achieving that objective. Whatever means might be available to reach that goal, we will be ready to embrace them.

Dialogue and negotiation, including using the good offices of the Secretary-General which have been made available to the two parties, are the most realistic and feasible means for making progress in the peace process. Ethiopia is ready to go more than half way to make that a reality, but so far it has largely been left in the proverbial situation of trying to clap with one hand. It is our hope that reason will prevail in Eritrea sooner rather than later.

The peace process in Somalia has now come to a very critical point, with the Somalis having now come closer than any time in the last 13 years to establishing a national Government. Ethiopia will continue, as a member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Facilitation Committee, to contribute to the achievement of national reconciliation and work to help the Somali State rise from the ashes. That is an obligation for Ethiopia and it is also consistent with the vital interest Ethiopia has in peace and stability in our subregion.

For those reasons, Ethiopia was looking forward to the final consummation of the peace process between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA), which has now slowed down because of the tragedy in Darfur — an unanticipated tragedy. Ethiopia is keen to see the Darfur crisis resolved and the humanitarian tragedy dealt with as speedily as possible. Peace and stability in the Sudan is so critical for our subregion and for that reason Ethiopia will continue to do the best it can, including as a member of the AU Peace and Security Council, to assist that sister country to overcome the challenge it is facing.

Ethiopia's contribution to peace and peace-building is not limited to what we have been doing in our own subregion. We have from the outset been closely associated with the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, including at the highest level. Moreover, initially as part of the African Union mission and later as part of the United Nations Operation in Burundi, Ethiopia's contingent in Burundi has continued to contribute in a modest way to the success of the peace process there.

Another modest contribution we are making is in joining the efforts under way for the restoration of peace in Liberia as part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

Certainly, we are also the beneficiaries of the support of a great many countries through the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), whose work has been critical for keeping the situation between Ethiopia and Eritrea stable. We are indeed grateful to UNMEE, its personnel at all levels, and to the troop-contributing countries.

We all agree that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is a crime against humanity. As our Secretary-General rightly stated in his address to this Assembly at the 3rd meeting, "No cause, no grievance, however legitimate in itself, can begin to justify such acts". The international community should therefore fight that scourge with greater resolve and in unison.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Ethiopia's commitment to the United Nations and to the principles and purposes for the promotion of which it was created. It is our earnest hope that the United Nations will continue to enhance its credibility with respect to its entire membership. That is why the reform of the Organization is so critical and imperative, including the reform of the Security Council, so that regions, including Africa, can have the fair representation they aspire to. Without a doubt, enhanced democratization will make the United Nations more transparent and therefore more credible. The future of the Organization rests on it. In the meantime, Ethiopia will continue to be devoted to the United Nations and to the values it stands for.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of the Niger.

Mrs. Mindaoudou (Niger) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to join those who have spoken before me in extending warm congratulations on behalf of my country, my delegation and myself for your brilliant election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The Chairman of the African Union, His Excellency Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo, already expressed here a few days ago our continent's gratitude to the international community, which, by choosing you, has made one of Africa's most illustrious sons President of the General Assembly. We naturally associate ourselves with that expression of gratitude. We wish you every success in carrying out your lofty mission, and you know you have always had Niger's support. To your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Julian Hunte, I should like to express our congratulations on the skill, enthusiasm and authority with which he conducted the work of the fifty-eighth session of the Assembly in a difficult international context.

Today, the international community finds itself at a crossroads. International peace and security — already sorely tested by recurrent armed conflicts — are subjected to threats or bloody attacks of terrorist acts, which further darken the global atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity. In your opening statement, Mr. President, you mentioned one of those persistent and bloody conflicts — that of the Middle East, a conflict that costs so much to humanity in terms of human lives, financial resources and lost hope. That region's macabre statistics remind us — as if that were still necessary — of the urgent need to bring the parties to the negotiating table on the basis of the road map, which the Security Council itself endorsed through its resolution 1515 (2003).

Today, in addition to the Palestinian problem and in light of Iraq, the situation in the Middle East is central to world peace and security as never before. With respect to Iraq — a country with which Niger shares the same faith, Islam, the basis of our common membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference — we cannot fail to deplore so much loss of human life and so much blind violence, which are the daily lot of the Iraqi people. We earnestly hope that greater, revitalized international cooperation will enable us to swiftly establish free and democratic institutions in Iraq, put an end to the chaos that seems to have taken root there and bring to the country the peace and stability necessary for its socio-economic development.

Niger, as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, believes that a sustained dialogue between India and Pakistan will make it possible to lay the foundation for a peaceful solution to that conflict by enabling the people of Kashmir to exercise their right to self-determination, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Concerning Western Sahara, Niger reaffirms its support for United Nations efforts with a view to reaching a just and comprehensive settlement of the conflict. The commendable actions of the Secretary-General should be continued and supported until we see a successful conclusion, in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 1495 (2003) and 1541 (2004).

In Niger, at the end of a long and sometimes painful process, we have established a political system in which a multitude of parties, private media and civil society organizations flourish, all of them under the protective umbrella of a constitution that guarantees the separation of powers and an independent judiciary. His Excellency Mr. Tandja Mamadou, President of the Republic since the democratic elections of 22 November 1999, invited the people of Niger on 14 September 2004 to vote in new presidential and legislative elections that will be held starting on 13 November 2004. That will be the first time since 1991 — when the multiparty system was established in Niger — that a fully democratic mandate has been completed. And it will be successfully, because in our country, social peace has returned, State authority has been restored, the economy is back on track and the people of Niger have new hope. On 24 July, the building of democratic structures was completed through municipal and local elections, to the great satisfaction of everyone.

The restored status of the State has made it possible — thanks to the personal intervention of President Tandja Mamadou — to quickly overcome the resistance of the remaining few who were still opposed to the expanded polio vaccination programme. Here, I must sincerely thank the international community — particularly the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Centres for Disease Control of the United States and Rotary International — for having effectively assisted us in our efforts in that fight.

At the external level, our public and private bilateral partners who left Niger before 1999 have since returned. Niger's presidency of the West African Economic and Monetary Union and, last year, of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States has given greater visibility to our external action aimed at peace and security in Africa. In particular, that action has taken the form of sending a Niger contingent to Côte d'Ivoire, military observers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and civilian police components to Burundi, the Central African Republic and Timor-Leste. All that has convinced us that the international community's support is more essential today than ever before to help Africa strengthen the capacities of its subregional institutions and those of its continental organization, the African Union.

Under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, the African Union is working ceaselessly to prevent conflicts in African countries where peace reigns, to consolidate peace and security where — as in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone or Liberia — the populations have barely emerged from a situation of political instability or bloody armed conflicts, and, lastly, to extinguish the hotbeds of tension persisting in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and the Sudan.

Our experience with conflict prevention and resolution in Africa teaches us that the golden rule in that respect is to have confidence in subregional institutions and the African Union and to support them with consistent logistical and financial means. In that regard, Niger welcomes the decision taken by the Security Council to support the African Union's decision to strengthen and expand the observation mission in Darfur and to encourage member States to provide all the equipment and logistical, financial and material resources required for the mission's swift expansion. We earnestly hope that the various parties to the conflict will respond positively to the appeals coming from Africa and elsewhere to swiftly put an end to that tragedy and to bring about a comprehensive peace agreement, on which the advent of a peaceful Sudan will depend.

Within the framework of Africa's new development initiatives, the heads of State of the African Union agreed, during a special summit held recently in Ouagadougou, to place employment at the centre of their political, economic and social policies. As rightly pointed out by His Excellency Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso and host of the summit, Africa needs the effective support of the international community to implement the decisions of Ouagadougou.

From the Millennium Declaration to the world conferences and summits that followed it, many international decisions made the fight against poverty a world priority and a major challenge for humanity. How, then, can it be that hundreds of millions of people continue to languish in abject poverty and total destitution? How can it be that, in this era of technological and scientific advances, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics continue to wreak havoc throughout the world, particularly in Africa? How can it be that, at a time of globalization, many parts of the planet — particularly the least developed countries — are still totally excluded from international trade? And how can it be that, despite the commitments undertaken through the relevant international conventions, the global environment continues insidiously to deteriorate, dangerously jeopardizing the future of generations to come?

In light of that situation, and in view of the dearth of financial resources to address the crucial problems assailing humanity, we must wonder about the existence of real political will on the part of rich countries to help the most impoverished countries overcome abject poverty. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS and the World Solidarity Fund for the Elimination of Poverty — whose creation we welcome — suffer from a cruel lack of resources.

Furthermore, we believe the modalities for granting those resources to eligible countries should be modelled after those in force for the funds obtained in the framework of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, in order to ensure management that is both transparent and responsible.

We have to face the reality. Given the economic stagnation, poverty and the lack of prospects that are serious threats for social stability and the young democracies of developing countries, international cooperation is the key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals — as long as developed and developing countries agree to assume their respective responsibilities. In this respect, the commitments made in Doha to promote a just trade, the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation on Sustainable Development remain the cornerstones for implementation of the Goals.

However, the meagre results achieved in the implementation of conclusions from major forums prompt the international community as a whole to re-examine its conscience. The upcoming high-level dialogue on financing for development should be an opportunity to once again place at the core of the debate the important issue of the mobilization of resources for development. In this respect, taxation at a level to be agreed upon — as was recalled at the last summit on poverty — on all international financial transactions could provide the substantial funding so necessary for attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

Endemic poverty, which affects the African continent in particular, is not a question of fate. It is possible to reduce poverty as long as the international community is resolute in tackling it. It is possible to reduce poverty if industrialized countries implement without delay the enhanced programme to alleviate the debt of highly indebted countries and agree to cancel all bilateral public debts. It is possible to reduce poverty if industrialized countries agree to increase official development assistance to the level necessary to reach the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. It is possible to reduce poverty if industrialized countries resolve to open their markets to commodities from developing countries, and if raw materials from those countries are purchased at their proper values. It is possible to reduce poverty if industrialized countries eliminate their farming subsidies for cotton and support the countries concerned in their policy for providing rural areas with a suitable farming infrastructure and, especially, with small rural facilities.

Lastly, it is possible to reduce poverty if globalization is better managed and if interdependence leads to the establishment of an international financial and commercial structure that is democratic and able to meet the needs of all parties.

Not so long ago the international community, with the Group of 8 in the lead, solemnly declared its commitment to support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Today we must acknowledge that that great enthusiasm still has not materialized in concrete actions on a scale that would meet the legitimate aspirations of African continent. Despite constant efforts by the African countries, there is still much left to be done to meet the objectives contained in that vast and ambitious partnership.

I am pleased to say here that Niger is very pleased to work with the Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General for NEPAD, as well as with the Office of the High Representative of the United Nations for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Countries and Small Island Developing States.

To conclude, it is important that the Desertification Convention be effectively implemented, a convention that is seen as the best illustration of the link between environmental degradation and poverty.

Speaking of environmental degradation, how can we overlook the ecological ravages caused by the current locust invasion in part of Africa? Because it did not act in good time, the international community — which had been warned of this danger far in advance — must now mobilize, as soon as possible, sufficient financial and material means to stop the spread of the plague in order to halt the spectre of famine that looms over the populations of northern Africa, the Sahel and West Africa as a whole.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Souef Mohamed El-Amine, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of the Comoros.

Mr. El-Amine (Comoros) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Comoros and on my own behalf, to congratulate you warmly on your election to preside over the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. Your task is by no means an easy one, but it is an honour to you personally, to your country and to the entire African continent. No other organization can boast of that universal mission. I would therefore like to assure you of the full readiness of my delegation to work with you for the success of that noble mission in the service of peace and security in the world.

My delegation welcomes the way in which your predecessor guided the work at the fifty-eighth session. On behalf of the Comoros I hail the tireless commitment and complete availability of the Secretary-General in the fight he leads to advance the ideals of peace, social justice, development and freedom throughout the world.

> The world — a world of peace and vision,
> Of ideas and union now unfurled,
> A world that has divided lands
> And with seas that share their sands;
> World of tolerance and knowing,
> World abundance, overflowing;
> World of peace, world that charmed,
> No, world; you cannot be harmed.
>
> Nations unity provided,
> But hearts tend to be divided.
> For we have met each other,
> And yet our peoples live in fear.
> Children of the world,
> and countries of the world,

Where is the world?
What is this world?

Borders here do not exist;
Prayers vanish in the mist.
Terror is their daily lot;
Fear is all that they have got.
Killers rule instead of bread.

Millennium world, world so fair,
Yet a world of billionaires;
World of speeches of all sorts
Within fora, and of courts.
World rejecting our solutions
and denying resolutions.
What a world. What a peace.

While the world is slowly forging ahead in this third millennium, we are obliged to note that the feelings of our respective peoples are fluctuating between hope and concern. Indeed, while the relationship between peace and development is becoming increasingly justified and is making them indivisible, the path of world events is tending to call this into question. It is indeed true that there can be no peace and no security in the world as long as hundreds of millions of individuals are still prisoners of destitution and poverty and still do not have the minimum necessary for a decent daily life. Nor can there be peace and security in the world as long as, working all together, we have not made the required efforts to save the hundreds of millions of human lives threatened by the scourges of AIDS and other pandemics.

Moreover, what kind of peace can there be in a world that makes the spread of weapons and the proliferation of hotbeds of tension the very pattern of its existence and the means for its evolution?

These are the problems before us, this forum with the highest priority mission of seeing to the proper conduct of world affairs, the prosperity and flourishing of the human race and to the control of the global environment by our actions, which must serve the cause and the welfare of each and every people, each nation and each citizen of the world.

That is why it is incumbent on the United Nations, today more than ever, to play fully its role as defined by the Charter. This role is one of vanguard action, of mediation par excellence, of stimulus and of promotion of the remarkable accomplishments wrought every day by the progress of science.

For that reason, my country says "no" to poverty, "no" to AIDS and other pandemics, "no" to terrorism and "yes" to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In order to combat the scourges of poverty, major diseases and terrorism, we need a firm and determined will to work for development.

The Millennium Summit, in which all the foremost leaders of our planet participated, took full note of that reality. The Millennium Declaration set out the steps and the course to follow in order to effectively direct the world's development and progressively correct the problems identified. The Declaration established 2015 as the deadline for reviewing the plan of action that each country must implement, in a collective resolve to get the world back on track.

The Union of the Comoros endorses the Millennium Development Goals. While working for progress in the national reconciliation process, the Government of my country, like all other members of the community of nations, has made the necessary efforts to establish a poverty reduction strategy. Today, that document to which all active forces in our country contributed, constitutes the instrument panel of our development priorities.

In order for the Comoros to act on those development priorities, it requires the assistance of the international community. It was only this past April that my country finally completed the establishment of its institutions, thus bringing to a close the separatist and institutional crisis that for seven years had shaken the foundations of our State.

In particular, we hope that the entire international community will support the African Union's call, issued at the recent summit at Addis Ababa, for an international donors round-table meeting to be held to assist the convalescent Comoros. This would enable it to recover and by stages to rejoin the other nations in working at the subregional, continental and global levels to achieve sustainable development, which is now its greatest priority.

The firm national commitment of all Member States of the international community is required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This militates in favour of the enhanced representation of continents and peoples in the United Nations.

We should therefore consider increasing the permanent membership of the Security Council to include, for example, the Republic of India, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Federative Republic of Brazil. The African continent and the Arab world also deserve appropriate representation on the Security Council. That is the way to achieve equity, and equity is desperately needed for there to be greater justice and peace in the world. That appears to be what must be done today to create the necessary balance for control of the international order and the global environment, which have never been so unstable and uncertain.

In the eternal search for peace, social justice and prosperity, the fate of small island States, which face so many threats to their survival, must not remain in jeopardy. Let us be fully aware that numerous countries are destined to disappear because of such hazards as rising sea-levels, desertification, cyclones and volcanic eruptions. Accordingly, we must consider specific actions for each of those States. We urge the international community to mobilize on a large scale to ensure the success of the forthcoming meting of small island developing States, to be convened on the island of Mauritius early in 2005.

I must not fail to affirm before the Assembly that my country, the Union of the Comoros, in its concern to maintain its unity and integrity, considers the issue of the Comorian island of Mayotte to be one of its greatest and most urgent priorities. My Government is convinced that a speedy settlement of this dispute will further the development of the country as a whole and will enable it to resolutely take its place alongside peace- and freedom-loving countries and to champion universal ideals and promote democracy in the world.

The Union of the Comoros therefore calls on the French Republic to engage in a constructive political dialogue on this issue, in compliance with General Assembly resolution 3385 (XXX), which admitted the Comoros to the United Nations as the Comoro Archipelago, composed of four islands: Mayotte, Anjouan, Mohéli and Grande-Comore.

In the same spirit, my country attaches the utmost importance to the principle of a single independent and indivisible China and calls for the restoration of the island of Taiwan to its rightful home.

My country truly values the very constructive dialogue now under way between the Government of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the question of Kashmir.

The Union of the Comoros sincerely hopes that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples will soon institute a dialogue that will bring about an end to the violence and lead to the peaceful coexistence of those two neighbouring peoples.

It also hopes to see a just and equitable settlement to the question of Western Sahara and vigorously supports the efforts made to that end by the United Nations and the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco.

The Union of the Comoros vehemently condemns the hostage-takings in Iraq and hopes to see a rapid return of peace and security in Iraq, which will contribute to security in the region.

The Union of the Comoros is closely following developments in Darfur. It supports the efforts of the African Union, the Government of the Sudan and the entire international community to find a speedy, just and equitable settlement of that question.

Finally, I hope that the work of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly will be successful, and I join all those eminent personalities who have preceded me at this noble rostrum in expressing my country's most fervent desires for greater peace and security throughout the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. Ping, on your election as President of the General Assembly during its fifty-ninth session. We are confident that you will conduct the proceedings of this session with great competence. I would like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, who so ably presided over the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

I would like to express at this time my deep appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General to harmonize international relations and ensure respect for the principles of the Charter and international law, with a view to strengthening international peace and security. His statement before this Assembly marks a landmark in the quest for the rule of law and respect for the role of the United Nations in international conflicts.

In my statement, I will focus on the turbulent situation in the Middle East and, more specifically, on the core of the conflict in the Middle East. The situation in the region of Western Asia — or the Middle East — is in turmoil. The occupation of Iraq was founded on false pretexts, further damaging the already grave situation resulting from Israel's policies and practices in occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. A total absence of law and order is now the general pattern of life in occupied Iraq. This continued occupation is wreaking havoc on the economic and social aspects of life there. We urge the competent institutions, namely the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council, to take the necessary and appropriate measures to ensure Iraq's independence and sovereignty as soon as possible.

Israel is the only nuclear Power in the Middle East. It has approximately the fourth most powerful army in the world and is a sophisticated arms developer and dealer with no ethical or moral constraints and no concern for human rights. The Israeli Government can therefore do anything it wishes, and it acts like a high-tech military expert and rogue State. It has become tremendously useful for the United States, since it has strategically placed itself in the centre of the global arms industry. Counting on the support of the United States, Israel breaks moral and international laws with impunity.

The daily assaults on peaceful Palestinian towns and villages — the demolition of homes and houses, the bulldozing and uprooting of age-old fruit-bearing olive and citrus trees, the targeted killings and assassinations, the closures, the imposition of a state of siege and curfews and the use of excessively disproportionate firepower, which has resulted, so far, in more than 3,200 deaths and thousands of injuries — are common knowledge. We completely reject the allegation by Israel that this is carried out in self-defence. The Palestinians under occupation, with their meagre means of combat, are the party exercising the right to self-defence. Almost 8,000 Palestinians are being held without trial under merciless conditions, and when they protested against those conditions, an Israeli minister boasted, and I quote, "let them go on a hunger strike until they die".

In addition to all the other methods Israel uses to obstruct peace, it holds our democratically elected President, Yasser Arafat, in confinement and has announced that they can find no partner with whom to negotiate peace. With whom are the negotiations for settlement and peace to be negotiated, if not with the democratically elected President? Israel, and others of the same mind, must wish to see a continuation of the status quo or to deal with an imposed — and not democratically elected — group or person.

The performance-based road map was unanimously backed by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). We have accepted the road map since, in our opinion, it augured well. The road map envisaged a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and stated that the solution of the conflict

> "will only be achieved through an end to violence and terrorism, when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror and willing and able to build a practising democracy based on tolerance and liberty, and through Israel's readiness to do what is necessary for a democratic Palestinian state to be established".

The Palestinians, through their representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization, embraced the road map and believes it offers another opportunity to end the conflict. We hope that the Quartet will seriously assume the noble task of implementing the objectives of the road map.

Acts of State terrorism were Israel's response to the performance-based road map. To be more specific, a 2,000-pound bomb was dropped after the Palestinians scrupulously observed an unofficial ceasefire. Israel still adheres to the 14 reservations it had regarding the road map. The nebulous ideas and intentions revealed in the exchange of letters between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon on the matter of the commitment to the road map are far from encouraging and keep the road map and Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) in limbo if not completely neglecting and rejecting them.

In his letter of assurance dated 14 April 2004 to Prime Minister Sharon, President Bush reiterates that

> "the United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in

> accordance with ... the path set forth in the roadmap".

However, when President Bush addresses the reality on the ground, he assures Israel that "it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949".

He admits that as part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). However, Mr. Bush and Mr. Sharon do not topographically identify the secure and recognized borders of Israel.

In the aforementioned letter of assurance, President Bush stresses that the United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish State. He does not concern himself with the security of the so-called provisional State of Palestine. He seems to be oblivious to the fact that 20 per cent of the citizens of Israel are non-Jewish and that Israel has not as yet defined who is a Jew. This concept will inevitably lead to the creation of a racist society within the Israeli political entity.

To ensure the success of the road map and the achievement of its goal — a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005 — the plan also requires that Israel "freezes all settlement activity" and "withdraws from Palestinian areas occupied from 28 September 2000".

Commenting on the meeting between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon, Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, stated on 15 April 2004:

> "The EU remains firmly committed to a negotiated settlement resulting in two viable, sovereign and independent States ... as the only way to achieve a permanent peace and an end to the occupation that began in 1967, in the framework of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.
>
> "EU heads of State or Government recently indicated that they would not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. A permanent settlement must also include an agreed, just, fair and realistic solution to the refugee issue".

In order further to deviate from the direct route to the targeted destination, Sharon declared that he was absolutely determined to carry out disengagement in Gaza despite the political problems within his own party, the Likud. Indeed, the party believes that disengagement conflicts with the Zionist aim of the creeping annexation of Palestinian territory. Sharon's plan creates a situation in which Israel will have to leave the settlements but will still control everything that enters and exits Gaza. It will tightly seal off Gaza and block the only outlet that allows Palestinians in Gaza to cross into and from neighbouring Egypt.

All of this is a source of concern for the international community, as reflected in the number of meetings held by the General Assembly. Israel did not heed the request by the Assembly in resolution ES-10/14, which, by necessity, called for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the following question:

> "What are the legal consequences arising from the construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, as described in the report of the Secretary-General, considering the rules and principles of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions?"

The General Assembly, by an overwhelming majority of 150 votes, acknowledged the Court's advisory opinion of 9 July 2004. The representatives of the Governments of the United States of America and of Israel were among the six countries that voted against.

I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express our great appreciation for the learned opinion of the judges. I wish to quote from the opinion, as it is of direct relevance to the General Assembly:

> "All States are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction;

> "… The United Nations, and especially the General Assembly and the Security Council, should consider what further action is required to bring to an end the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and the associated regime, taking due account of the present advisory opinion."

In order to restore faith and confidence in the effectiveness of the United Nations and its Charter, I would appeal that the opinion of the Court be heeded and that action-oriented resolutions, including concrete mechanisms for implementation, be adopted and carried out.

The Palestinian people and leadership have demonstrated goodwill and accepted in good faith the provisions of the road map and other proposals leading to the termination of the Israeli occupation of our Palestinian territory, so that we in the Middle East can all live in peace and security and stability. What is needed is for the other party, Israel, to commit itself to respond, in word and in deed.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.14

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 28 September 2004, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping .... (Gabon)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Address by Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Kiribati.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Tong: It is with great pleasure that I bring warm greetings from the Government and people of Kiribati on whose behalf I have the honour to address the Assembly today.

Before I begin, I would like to extend our congratulations to Mr. Jean Ping on his election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. We have every confidence in his able leadership to guide the work of the Assembly and to deliver conclusive outcomes. He has our full support and cooperation in carrying out his work. I wish also to thank the President's predecessor for the excellent work he has done in steering the work of the Assembly during the past year. My congratulations also go to the Secretary-General for his sterling leadership of our Organization during these trying times and for rising commendably to the challenge.

We gather again this year amidst the reality of daunting challenges that continue to confront us as individual nations and as a global community. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and other parts of the world, the scourge of terrorism and the existence of nuclear arsenals, accelerated environmental degradation and the threat of global warming and sea-level rise, hunger and poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other non-communicable diseases, the marginalization of the least developed countries within the global economy and underdevelopment, all continue to pose major challenges that our Organization must address today.

Those challenges cast a dark shadow over the commitments made by world leaders at the Millennium Summit held here in New York four years ago, pledging to work collectively to maintain peace and security, to eliminate poverty and to promote development for the benefit of all mankind in the new millennium.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons continue to threaten international security. We must be unified in our approach and address those challenges effectively by strengthening multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements and through closer regional and international cooperation. Kiribati supports all non-proliferation efforts and in that respect is party to, among others, the Treaty on the

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We commend and support the work of the international community and efforts taken at the national, regional and international levels to respond to the challenges of terrorism, recognizing the need for international solidarity in addressing that increasing global threat.

Kiribati is committed to the global fight against terrorism. Terrorism knows no boundaries and we cannot claim immunity from it. Indeed, as a small island developing State we have very little capacity to develop any effective countermeasures and are therefore especially vulnerable to terrorism.

We acknowledge the importance of complying with United Nations resolutions and international security arrangements that have been adopted in the fight against terrorism. While we cannot afford to be complacent in our efforts in that regard, it must be recognized that the requirements for compliance with those resolutions and arrangements do pose enormous challenges for countries such as Kiribati. Our limited resources and technical capacity are already committed to providing for the basic and essential social and economic needs of our rapidly growing population, thus placing severe constraints on our ability to make progress in compliance. I would like to note, however, that, with technical assistance from our development partners, we have made progress in enacting important legislation relating to terrorism and transnational crime. We expect to make further progress on compliance with the counter-terrorism requirements shortly.

The progress made so far has revolved primarily around the introduction of legislation. We recognize that this is just the beginning of the process. The implementation and enforcement of the legislation enacted will pose an immense challenge. In this respect, we will continue to count on the assistance and support of the international community.

We note with deep regret and concern the loss of life and devastation to property caused by the recent series of hurricanes affecting the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the United States. We offer our deep sympathy to those affected by those natural disasters.

The adverse impact of climate change and sea-level rise is, indeed, a critical security issue for the global community in this new millennium, especially for low-lying island States like Kiribati. That issue must take centre stage with other international security issues. We urge the international community to agree on a unified global response in order to better protect the environment, in the same way that the international community is being encouraged to respond to terrorism and other threats to global security. Our inability as a global community to agree on a unified stand on climate change and sea-level rise is very disappointing indeed, and we deplore the notion that economic growth must take precedence over environmental issues at any cost. Our very existence as a State — indeed, the existence all States similar to Kiribati — is at stake if such thinking continues to prevail.

I would like at this juncture to express our gratitude to the many countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol and to appeal to those that have not to do so as a matter of urgency. We have demonstrated remarkable solidarity in the fight against global terrorism. Can we not demonstrate the same solidarity in the fight against climate change and sea-level rise?

Regional cooperation has been a very effective mechanism in addressing the many challenges faced by countries in our region. Regional cooperation has enabled many Pacific countries to meet some of the counter-terrorism requirements. Regional cooperation has also enabled us to effectively address emerging issues confronting our region; the outstanding success of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands is a clear demonstration of that.

We in the Pacific are confident of our ability to steer a course for the future. We have approved work to commence on a Pacific plan that will promote collective action in the areas of security, good governance, economic growth and sustainable development. We envisage that the Pacific plan will result in the delivery of tangible benefits to our respective peoples and communities.

We recognize the need for, and welcome, strengthened cooperation and the development of closer linkages and partnerships between the United Nations and its specialized agencies and other organizations, including the Pacific Islands Forum. Such linkages and partnerships can only result in the more effective, coordinated and harmonized delivery of assistance to member countries.

Making progress with regard to the development aspirations of our peoples is a high — if not the highest — priority for many of us who are here today. Our national policy objective is to achieve the equitable distribution of development benefits to all our peoples, based on the principles of good governance. We are committed to the Millennium Declaration and are on track in our national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Goals have been integrated and mainstreamed into our national development strategy. We are committed to pursuing those goals as the basis of sustainable development. In this connection, I would like to express our appreciation to all our development partners, who, over the years, have contributed meaningfully to the realization of our development aspirations.

While we are grateful for the assistance extended by our development partners, there is scope for us to achieve more for our peoples — and to do so without development assistance. Kiribati has a large exclusive economic zone that has an abundant fisheries resource. Those resources are presently being harvested by vessels from distant-water fishing nations under license arrangements. However, the return from these licensing arrangements is negligible, at only around 5 per cent of the landed value of the catch.

Naturally, we would like to see greater returns from that resource. Our ability to achieve sustainable economic development depends on it. Accordingly, we urge the flag States of those fishing interests to encourage their industries to explore the mutual benefits to be gained from collaboration with resource owners in establishing on-shore facilities that will add value to the commodity. We believe that such a model will also result in easing the pressure on fish stocks and ensure conservation of the resource for the sustainable benefit of mankind.

The entry into force in June this year of the Western and Central Pacific Tuna Convention represents a major development in the management of the western and central Pacific tuna fishery.

In this age of rapid globalization, advances in information technology and trade liberalization, it is regrettable that, while some are reaping the full benefits of those advances and developments, significantly more remain on the fringes. The reality is that a large proportion of the world's population, most of whom live in developing countries, continue to live in poverty and are marginalized in trading arrangements and market access opportunities. The promise of globalization and open trading as a positive force for economic growth, and social progress continues to elude the many. Much work needs to be done to ensure that the many also enjoy the benefits of globalization.

Kiribati supports the findings of the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. We urge that the findings of the report be taken into consideration and incorporated into the work of the Assembly, especially for the 2005 high-level review of the outcome of the Millennium Summit.

We welcome the United Nations support for the convening, early next year in Mauritius, of the International Meeting for the 10-Year Review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Like other small island developing States, we attach great importance to that review. With the continued support and commitment of our development partners to the process, we can be assured of important outcomes that will go a long way in making a real difference to the quality of life for our peoples.

We share the concerns of the international community about the spread of HIV/AIDS and its devastating impact as both a health crisis and a development concern. We welcome the recent developments in the search for affordable drugs for HIV/AIDS victims in developing countries. We encourage greater collaboration on HIV/AIDS research and the mobilization of resources for prevention activities and for better medical care for affected patients.

We believe in the continuing relevance and importance of the role of the United Nations and its ability to respond to the challenges of our contemporary world. In this regard, Kiribati welcomes and fully supports the efforts to reform this Organization to enable it to better respond to the challenges of this era.

Given the crucial role of the Security Council in the promotion of international peace and security and the importance we attach to that issue, we see the necessity for Security Council reform, including the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. Expansion is required to better reflect the realities of our world today. We note that some countries, including Japan, have consistently committed substantial resources towards the maintenance of global peace and security, and we believe that they should be accorded permanent membership on the Security Council.

We attach great importance to our membership in this noble Organization, and we reaffirm our commitment to upholding the noble values and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Charter epitomizes our hope for achieving justice and equality and the safeguarding and promotion of fundamental human rights of all peoples. Within that context, we believe that the exclusionary principles applied to Taiwan in its bid for United Nations membership go against the very values and objectives of the Charter that we all strive to uphold. In this era of tension and conflict we should discard the present exclusionary practices and adopt a more embracing environment where all countries willing and able to contribute to the international community's efforts to promote world peace and stability are welcomed as equal partners. Taiwan has made and continues to make notable contributions to the development of many developing countries and has the capacity to contribute constructively to the good work of the United Nations. It is therefore regrettable that the desire of the 23 million people of Taiwan to again become a part of that global community of nations continues to be rejected.

The challenges that confront us at this point in time are indeed daunting, but they are not insurmountable. With renewed commitments and with a common resolve to work in close cooperation and in support of each other, we can succeed in creating a more secure, a more prosperous and a more just world for all in this millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Kiribati for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Fabio Berardi, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs of the Republic of San Marino.

Mr. Berardi (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): At the outset, I would like to express my great and profound satisfaction for the recent release of four hostages kidnapped in Iraq, among them a young woman whose mother is a San Marino national engaged in humanitarian activities for the Iraqi civilian population. On behalf of the Government of San Marino I wish wholeheartedly to thank the Government of Italy, which played an active role in the release, as well as all of those who made that release possible.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino I wish to congratulate Mr. Jean Ping, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon, on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I also wish to thank the outgoing President, Mr. Julian Hunte, for the total commitment and determination he showed in his work.

United Nations activities have thus far been crucial in reducing conflicts between States. However, although the number of international conflicts has decreased, mankind is still facing new threats, which can only be tackled multilaterally. So that it can continue to serve the international community, the United Nations should be given more effective tools to enhance mediation and peaceful settlement of disputes, preventive control, verification, planning and use of sanctions, in order to prevent the outbreak of warfare and to promote disarmament and arms control. Moreover, the United Nations must receive adequate support so that it can better meet the growing number of requests for peacekeeping operations in various regions of the world. In that context, we appreciate the results obtained so far, but the process requires a stronger will on behalf of our Governments to comply with international rules and implement a concrete and effective cooperation regime.

In line with relevant international standards, San Marino has recently passed a special law to combat terrorism and associated crimes. It is also actively cooperating with the two United Nations anti-terrorism committees established pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1373 (2001).

Since the tragic 11 September attacks on the United States of America, the international community has become aware of the seriousness of the threat of terrorism. Recurrent dramatic events worldwide, the violent attacks perpetrated in Iraq — not only against soldiers but also civilians, the media and, most recently, even volunteers of non-governmental organization humanitarian missions — force our countries to realize the full scope of this phenomenon and its proliferation, and the need to search for a common and effective response based on a stronger joint commitment.

The horrifying terrorist act carried out in Ossetia against hundreds of innocents and so many children demonstrates that the widespread strategy of fear, hatred and devastation is humanly and ethically unacceptable.

San Marino once again condemns any form of terrorism, the most serious and impending threat to peace, for which there can be neither explanation nor justification. We support the search for constructive solutions that promote dialogue and mutual understanding among peoples of different cultures and religions with a view to the dissemination of an increasingly shared culture of peace and cooperation that will help to reject violence and oppression.

The Government of San Marino avails itself of this opportunity to express its special thanks to the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, who contributed to the establishment of an Iraqi interim Government, and renews its support to Prime Minister Allawi for the forthcoming democratic elections scheduled for January 2005. The elections will surely be a milestone for the Iraqi people in the exercise of their sovereignty.

We trust that the international community will help to achieve national reconciliation in Iraq, on the basis of Security Council resolution 1546 (2004) of 8 June, with regard to independence, security and legality. Despite the tragic attack on its headquarters in Baghdad last year, the United Nations can continue to play a key role in Iraq, especially at a time when the situation has become extremely complex and delicate, particularly from a human and political point of view.

Another major source of concern and disappointment for San Marino is the persistence of the Middle East crisis, which remains unsolved despite the efforts made by the United Nations to encourage dialogue and indispensable mediation.

To achieve the ultimate goal of legitimate, peaceful and safe coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, the political process outlined in the road map and supported by the international community still appears to be the only viable solution. Therefore, on behalf of the San Marino Government, I reiterate, as I recently expressed to both the Foreign Ministers of Israel and Palestine, our sincere hope that such a process will soon resume.

With regard to the reform of the Security Council, the position of the Republic of San Marino is well known. We favour an increase in the number of non-permanent members, in the most appropriate way, and of the gradual restriction of the right of veto, with a view to its eventual elimination. Indeed, the increase of the number of permanent seats and the extension of the right of veto would entail, in our view, a greater injustice through the perpetuation of privileges, the consolidation of discrimination within United Nations Member States, and it would limit the power of the General Assembly to elect the most suitable candidates in accordance with differing historical periods.

The Government of San Marino fully endorses General Assembly resolution 58/316, adopted on 1 July 2004, relating to the revitalization of the work of the Assembly itself. Similarly, we are satisfied with resolution 58/314, adopted on the same day, granting the Holy See wider and more incisive prerogatives as an Observer.

The safeguarding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, together with full respect for freedom, equality and democracy, have always been essential elements in the history of San Marino, and represent the very basis of its 1,700-year existence. These issues continue to regulate relations with other States and with international organizations. It is in this spirit that I express my best wishes once again to Ms. Louise Arbour, the recently appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

San Marino firmly believes in the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and has recently supported the draft ICC/United Nations relationship agreement and the setting up of an ICC liaison office in New York.

My country remains strongly committed to the campaign for the universal abolition of the death penalty, and it has recently ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the abolition of the death penalty.

The recent signature and ratification by San Marino of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been followed by a law granting full gender equality in the transmission of San Marino citizenship to children. Moreover, the Government has subsequently established for the first time in history a Ministry for Equal Opportunity.

As 2004 is the International Year of the Family, we hope that as many countries as possible will follow San Marino in signing the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are on the involvement of children in armed conflict; and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In addition, San Marino recently ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, thus starting a wide debate domestically on joint parental custody in case of parental separation.

Equal attention is being paid by my country to the most disadvantaged members of our families and societies and to the issue of the increasing ageing of the population, observed especially in developed countries. Against this background, our Government has been working to strengthen existing support infrastructures and assistance to families.

We sincerely hope soon to reach an agreement on the final text of an international convention on the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of disabled people.

The President took the Chair.

San Marino also wishes to underline the relevance of the objectives set forth in the Monterrey Consensus, especially considering that 14 million people, including 6 million children, are still dying of starvation. One billion people have no access to potable water, and 3 billion human beings do not receive adequate medical care.

Yet, poverty eradication cannot be implemented without respect for the ecosystem. In this regard, a valuable instrument to develop and protect our environment is, in our opinion, the Convention to Combat Desertification, recently ratified by San Marino, along with a view to actively participate in the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015.

In accordance with the objectives of health for all, San Marino recently ratified the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and reiterates its support to the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, with the awareness that the spreading of new epidemics requires stronger international cooperation.

On this important occasion, year after year meeting and exchanging views as representatives of our respective Governments, we express deeper and deeper concern and frustration vis-à-vis the many threats severely affecting humankind and possibly jeopardizing our common future.

Yet, the ideals and principles we reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration are still the highest benchmark to guide our efforts, both within our own States and within the work of the United Nations. We need to instil hope and actualize our universal aspirations to peace, cooperation and development.

To this end, let me express my best and warmest wishes to you, Mr. President, to the Secretary-General, to all United Nations officials and to all our countries.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Royal Highness Princess Hajah Masna, Special Envoy of Brunei Darussalam.

Princess Hajah Masna (Brunei Darussalam): I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. My delegation wishes to assure you of its full support and cooperation during your tenure of office. I also express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his leadership and tireless work over the past year.

I also extend my appreciation to Mr. Kofi Annan and his staff for their continuous hard work and commitment. The Secretary-General's personal dedication and leadership in the work of the United Nations, especially his efforts for global peace and stability, are an inspiration to us all. Those efforts are all the more necessary in the light of what many of us here have described as disturbing world developments.

On behalf of the Government of Brunei Darussalam, I wish to extend our sympathy and condolences to the Governments and the peoples of the United States and the Caribbean countries for the devastation caused by the recent hurricanes.

Since its establishment 59 years ago, the United Nations has achieved much, especially in ensuring international peace and security and creating a stable and prosperous world. There has not been a world war since its inception, and it has had a positive impact in many fields, such as peacekeeping, the eradication of various diseases and socio-economic development. We highly commend those efforts and value the sacrifices of those involved.

However, the achievements of the United Nations have been undermined by increasingly complex international developments. In his annual report on the work of the Organization (A/59/1), the Secretary-

General stated that the United Nations has been through an extraordinarily challenging year. It was the year in which the Iraq war brought the debate on the United Nations role into sharper focus.

Moreover, our Organization is still preoccupied with many unresolved issues. Among others, the Palestinian conflict remains a grave concern. Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction continue to pose serious threats. At the same time, poverty, environmental degradation and the spread of disease cause further misery and hardship for millions. Those issues demand our effective response, which will ultimately define the relevance of our Organization. We therefore need more than ever a strong and effective United Nations, one that is able to promote world peace and development. It must also give hope and purpose to the people who increasingly look to it to improve their lives.

However, the United Nations cannot do all that on its own. For it to carry out its responsibilities effectively, Member States need to work together, contribute resources and honour their commitments. As we work collectively to meet today's complex challenges, we must continue to adhere to the principles enshrined in the Charter. All the various conventions and treaties, from nuclear non-proliferation to environmental conservation, are manifestations of how we and the United Nations aim to protect our people and ensure that they can live to their fullest potential. In that regard, I wish to congratulate the Secretary-General for his address to the General Assembly, in which he emphasized the importance of those issues. It is through our reaffirmation of the Charter's principles that we can effectively uphold human ideals, enhance security and stability and promote sustainable development.

Without doubt, the United Nations is the most universal international body for providing a multilateral response. We need to reform the United Nations urgently so that it can be better equipped. In that regard, Brunei Darussalam fully supports the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen and revitalize the United Nations. In particular, we welcome the work of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which he has set up to address this.

We believe that United Nations reform should be comprehensive and include an expanded and more representative Security Council, a revitalized role for the General Assembly and better coordination among United Nations agencies. The interest a number of countries have shown in serving as permanent members of the Security Council is a clear indication of the desire for change.

Next year, the Assembly will consider the report of the High-level Panel and the recommendations of the Secretary-General. I realize how difficult it is to find a solution that is acceptable to all, but it is incumbent upon Member States to make a difference by implementing the much-needed reforms. Thus, a willingness to find a balanced set of proposals will be necessary. We look forward to the report, which, hopefully, will make the necessary bold and realistic proposals in order to end the decade-long debate on this issue.

Next year will be a critical time for us as we review implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. To ensure that the commitments set forth in the Millennium Declaration are implemented on schedule, we must act without delay. As for Brunei Darussalam, we are doing our part to achieve those goals.

As we begin to look into our agenda for this session, we must remain focused on the issues affecting many innocent lives in Palestine. Recent developments, such as the illegal construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, must be stopped and reversed. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the subsequent General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 reflect the international community's overwhelming support for ending injustice in the occupied territories.

The concerned parties must do all they can to prevent the situation from deteriorating. They must make serious efforts to honour their obligations as outlined in the road map. It is critical that progress should be made so that we can find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to that longstanding conflict.

The situation in other parts of the Middle East, such as Iraq, has created enormous anxiety. We acknowledge the central role of the United Nations and the efforts of other countries and parties in addressing the political and humanitarian dimensions of the problems.

In our region, we recognize that the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula has a serious impact on the peace, stability and security of the Asian-Pacific region. We appreciate the role of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States in seeking a solution through dialogue in the six-party talks. It is important that all parties concerned continue their efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to the issue.

We are deeply saddened by the horrifying scenes of harm inflicted upon innocent people by terrorist acts. Brunei Darussalam would like to convey its great sympathy to the Governments and the peoples of the countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe that have been targeted by terrorist attacks in the past year. We strongly condemn those atrocious acts.

Terrorism affects all of us — women and men, adults and children, developed and developing countries. It knows no boundaries. It has no ethnic, racial or religious affinities. Despite concerted efforts, devastating incidents this year have heightened the threats and challenges posed by terrorism. Those acts are becoming more complex, and our fight against them is far from over. It is therefore important to address this problem in a comprehensive manner. In doing so, we need to identify this problem's real source and root causes. This is what we have to bear in mind if we are to achieve a long-term solution. At the same time, we must not allow terrorists to divide us and undermine our determination to fight this menace collectively.

The challenges that we face require us to move forward to ensure that the United Nations continues to play its pivotal role. I am confident, Mr. President, that under your able leadership, the General Assembly will achieve success and make the decisions necessary to fulfil the hopes and expectations of the peoples it represents. Our tasks are great, but so also are our capabilities when we all work together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Prakash Sharan Mahat, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Nepal.

Mr. Mahat (Nepal): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your well-deserved election to preside over the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. I assure you of my delegation's full cooperation in the discharge of your important duties. Allow me to also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian R. Hunte, Minister for External Affairs of Saint Lucia, for his outstanding leadership in the Assembly's last session. Our full appreciation goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his invaluable and wise stewardship of the United Nations.

I also wish to express, on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the people of Nepal, our sincere condolences to the Governments, countries and peoples that have suffered the consequences of hurricanes and terrorist attacks in recent weeks and months.

We live in one of the most turbulent periods since the Second World War. The end of the cold war unleashed forces of democracy and economic openness, and the revolution in science, and technology has converted the world into a global village by shrinking distances and increasing connectivity. In tandem with this came many negative consequences. Internal conflicts have proliferated and populations have been displaced. International terrorism has increased. Globalization has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty, ignorance, disease and injustice have persisted and even worsened for the majority of humanity. Transnational crimes have spread their wings. No country is immune from the impact of these huge problems facing humanity today. Addressing these problems is a challenge that requires collective action by the international community in a spirit of multilateralism. The United Nations has the legitimacy and mandate to promote multilateral solutions to the shared problems of our time.

Indeed, the United Nations embodies all of humanity's shared dreams and its hopes for peace, security and development. Nepal has abiding faith in the principles and objectives enshrined in the United Nations Charter, and we recognize the central role of the United Nations in the pursuit of those shared dreams.

The emerging international situation is fraught with a multitude of challenges. Internal conflicts have afflicted countries from Iraq to Burundi and from Haiti to the Sudan. Terrorism has become a global menace, casting a dark shadow over the lives of millions of people around the globe. Deadly weapons pose a constant threat to the safety of human beings and the very existence of human civilization.

By all accounts, the situation in Iraq is highly volatile and extremely dangerous. The Nepalese people have yet to overcome their revulsion over the brutal killing of 12 innocent Nepalese hostages on 31 August in that country. We strongly condemn this dastardly crime committed by the terrorists. It is our fervent hope that the Iraqi people will be able to improve their security environment, hold the scheduled elections on time and live in a free, secure, democratic and prosperous Iraq.

The Middle East is caught in a cycle of violence. To break this cycle, both Israel and Palestine will have to exercise maximum restraint and engage in fruitful dialogue to build the mutual confidence critical for implementing the Quartet-endorsed road map, which offers a viable and durable two-State solution. Nepal supports the road map and views the Israeli plan to pull out of Gaza as a positive step.

Though the security situation has improved over time, Afghanistan is far from secure, and its reconstruction is far from satisfactory. The world community must do more to provide security to the entire country, hold free and fair elections and accelerate the speed of its reconstruction and development.

Nepal supports United Nations efforts to bring peace and normalcy to Haiti, Burundi, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. We are proud to be part of United Nations efforts in our own humble way in those countries by deploying our troops. The world community ought to sustain those efforts and help those countries in their rebuilding and reconstruction endeavours.

Nepal's track record is a testimony to its unflinching commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations. So far, over 45,000 Nepalese peacekeepers have served in various missions in an outstanding manner, and 47 of them have sacrificed their precious lives in the service of peace and humanity. At the moment, nearly 2,500 Nepalese blue helmets are deployed in 12 peacekeeping missions around the world.

Nepal appreciates the United Nations help in bridging the equipment gaps for our deployment. We urge the United Nations to enrich and widen the scope of consultations with troop-contributing countries, including in the areas of mission planning and pre-deployment preparations. We urge the United Nations to give greater opportunities to Nepalese nationals in management positions in the Secretariat and in field missions.

As we remain committed to peacekeeping and willing to bring our experience to the table, Nepal has sought a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2007-2008, after a gap of 19 years. I take this opportunity to appeal to Member States to give us the privilege of their support in the election to be held in 2006.

It is our firm belief that the international community must look beyond the immediate conflicts and seek to build a strong foundation for durable peace by pursuing disarmament, development and the rule of law.

Nepal is deeply concerned by the setback in the disarmament realm. Of course, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is very important to keeping such weapons from rogue elements. No durable peace will be possible without concerted efforts for disarmament, particularly of nuclear weapons, as they are the greatest threat to human civilization. It is regrettable that the Conference on Disarmament has had no programme of work for the last several years. That body must be allowed to work on a coherent strategy leading to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons in a time-bound manner.

We reiterate our support to nuclear-weapon-free zones and to keeping outer space free of such weapons. The international community should also work together to strengthen controls over small arms and light weapons in order to prevent their abuse by non-State actors.

Regional centres for peace and disarmament are instrumental in building confidence among nations. Nepal is eager to relocate to Kathmandu the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific at the earliest possible time. We are prepared to sign the necessary agreements, consistent with the prevailing diplomatic practices and provisions of the other two regional centres. We also want the Kathmandu process revived without delay.

International peace and security will continue to elude us until we address the root causes of conflicts: namely, poverty, ignorance, disease, exclusion and injustice. Most of the conflicts around the world today, which have regional and global consequences, are rooted in those sad human conditions. It is imperative that we address those conditions collectively for the shared benefit of humankind as a whole.

Today, more than a billion people live in absolute poverty. Millions of people remain illiterate. Preventable diseases are taking a huge toll on children, and HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are decimating entire societies, particularly in Africa. Growing populations have caused environmental degradation. Racial, cultural and wealth-related divisions have often been sources of exclusion, intolerance and injustice. Poverty has forced many to migrate, and crimes have flourished in those sad conditions.

There is no doubt that the developing countries have the primary responsibility for their own economic development and social progress. They need to take measures to reform their policies and institutions and create a climate in which enterprise, innovation and development can flourish. Most of those countries have been trying to do that on their own initiative and to live up to their side of the pledges undertaken in various global compacts.

But their development partners also have their obligations to meet under various global compacts, because developing countries, given the mammoth challenges they face, cannot grapple with them and meet the Millennium Development Goals without enhanced assistance from their development partners.

The development partners should meet the agreed official development assistance targets and provide greater debt relief to indebted countries. Indeed, although official development assistance flows have increased since 2002, they remain way below the additional $50 billion per year that is required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Debt repayment is eating up a large chunk of the resources of developing countries, and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative has yet to cover all least developed countries.

In the long run, fair globalization on a level playing field and open markets will help reduce poverty, increase employment and lift the standard of living in developing nations. The development partners, therefore, should dismantle their agricultural subsidies and open their markets to goods and labour from the South. They should also offer assistance to build capacities to attract and absorb foreign direct investment and to remove supply-side constraints, especially in least developed nations. The least developed countries — the most marginalized — need more generous assistance and market access, as agreed to in the Brussels Programme of Action, to break the vicious circle of poverty and join the global economy. Our studies have shown that Nepal will not be able to meet most Millennium Development Goals without such targeted measures from its development partners.

Their geographical bottleneck and distance from the main corridors of commerce handicap landlocked developing countries. We urge the transit and development partners to implement the Almaty Programme of Action and to overcome their difficulties.

Though Nepal joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) last year, most least developed countries remain outside the multilateral trade framework. We call on the members of the WTO to facilitate quick and concessionary memberships for those countries. Nepal also urges the international community to change the international financial architecture so as to give a voice to the small and weak.

Nepal believes that democracy, human rights and the rule of law will have to go hand in hand with peace and development to achieve overall progress in a country. It is heartening that more people in the world enjoy democracy and freedom today than ever before.

Sadly, however, conflicts and poverty have driven millions of people from their homes and countries. Conflicts, together with criminal gangs, have also violated the rule of law and peoples' human rights.

New democracies should learn from each other's experiences in consolidating democratic institutions and values, and the world community should join hands to fight transnational crime. The rule of law should apply not only in domestic situations but also throughout the international community.

There are 17 million refugees around the world — a staggering number. Many more millions of persons are internally displaced. In many areas, those people live in fear and under appalling conditions. Children are deprived of a decent education, and adults lack jobs and economic opportunities. In some cases, whole generations have grown up in refugee camps, struggling to find their identity.

The world community has an obligation to provide humanitarian assistance to such needy people and to help them resettle once they have returned home.

Nearly 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been living in camps in eastern Nepal for over a decade. Our bilateral efforts to find a negotiated settlement with Bhutan have been slow and halting. Even the refugees who have been verified by a joint team have yet to go back home. Other refugees are waiting for joint verification.

For generations, Nepal and Bhutan have remained close friends and have respected each other. The presence of Bhutanese refugees on our soil is an avoidable irritant. Therefore, we earnestly hope that the process of verification can be expedited, that verified refugees can be repatriated in a time-bound manner, and that returnees will be able to enjoy their human rights and to live in safety, dignity and honour in their own country.

Obviously, Nepal does not have the capacity to take care of those refugees, though we have let them stay on humanitarian grounds. Hence, we call on the international community, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to continue its support until the refugees are able to go back home and fully resettle there.

Our situation has become even more difficult due to the armed violence launched in 1996 by the so-called Maoists. That violent movement began just when democracy was taking root and economic growth was accelerating owing to policy reforms. The Maoists have brutalized people and destroyed private homes and public infrastructure worth billions of rupees. They have been abducting children and recruiting them as child soldiers. They have continued to defy our call to respects schools as zones of peace. They are engaged in extortion and in the intimidation and killing of innocent civilians.

This notwithstanding, His Majesty's Government has been sincerely seeking a results-oriented dialogue to find a political settlement. At the same time, the Government has an obligation to protect the lives of people and to safeguard private property and public infrastructure by strengthening security. The Government deeply appreciates the moral and material support our friends have been providing us in the fight against the violence.

In that context, we sincerely appreciate the interest expressed by the Secretary-General in the situation in Nepal, and his readiness to help the Government's efforts towards peace. The four-party coalition Government, with its broad mandate, is working seriously to initiate the peace process in Nepal. We are confident that we will be able to resolve the problem by ourselves.

Even in the midst of this difficulty, His Majesty's Government is committed to protecting the freedoms and human rights of citizens. The National Human Rights Commission monitors the human rights situation in the country, and a three-year National Human Rights Action Plan has been launched to implement our human rights commitments.

We have been seeking technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as concerns the capacity-building of the National Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Promotion Centre has been established to ensure inter-departmental coordination and the supervision of human rights issues.

The United Nations is the pivot of multilateralism that is imperative to address the complex challenges of our time. Nepal supports the ongoing efforts for United Nations reform, including those aimed at revitalizing the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Priority should be accorded to enhancing the role of the United Nations in the area of economic and social development. Security Council reform has become an important issue for the international community. Nepal has consistently supported the expansion of the Council and reform of its methods of work, so as to make it more representative, transparent and democratic.

In that context, the aspirations of some Member States — mainly India, Japan, Germany and Brazil — merit serious consideration for permanent membership in the Security Council. At the same time, there is urgent need to expand the Council's non-permanent membership to ensure greater participation of small Member States.

Nepal hopes the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the Secretary-General will come up with recommendations that could culminate in tangible reforms consistent with the present realities of the world. The high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly at the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations will be a landmark event that should make a great leap forward on a number of outstanding issues and expedite implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

This fall, Nepal is organizing the Second World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha and a world heritage site in Nepal. We need support and participation from our friends the Member States to make the conference a success and to revive in New York the international committee for the development of Lumbini, which we are planning to do soon.

To conclude, the dawn of the new millennium offers us both opportunities for and challenges to revitalizing the United Nations and strengthening multilateralism. As an active Member State, Nepal will do its best to contribute to the efforts of the United Nations in order to attain the shared goals of peace and prosperity for all.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Andrei Stratan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Stratan (Republic of Moldova): At the outset, I would like to say that I feel very honoured and privileged to participate for the first time in the work of the General Assembly and to represent the Republic of Moldova at this rostrum.

On behalf of the Moldovan delegation, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your well deserved election. I am confident that your vast experience and diplomatic skills will help the Assembly at the current session to fulfil its important tasks.

I join other speakers in expressing our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, for the dedicated and effective manner in which he guided the work of the previous session.

This has indeed been a difficult year for the Organization, with serious crises occurring in various parts of the world. Increasingly, the international community is faced with conflicts within States, the painful manifestations of which have been seen in conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, the North Caucasus and elsewhere.

We are all preoccupied by the implications and consequences of the crisis in Iraq. The Republic of Moldova considers that the United Nations should be engaged in a more consistent way in helping that country to stabilize its internal situation and to embark on the path towards recovery, development and democracy.

Earlier, in Spain and Turkey and, most recently, in the Russian Federation, we have seen how terrorism — the scourge of the twenty-first century — indiscriminately strikes the innocent, including children. We strongly believe that terrorist acts must be considered crimes against humanity. The Republic of Moldova strongly condemns all terrorist acts, for which there can be no excuse or justification. We pay homage to the victims of that violence.

Precisely due to the challenges faced, the Republic of Moldova fully supports the ongoing reform process of the United Nations system. A key aspect of that process is the reform of the Security Council. Too often, that principal organ has been accused of failures in the maintenance of international peace and security. It is therefore essential to make it more efficient in the discharge of its primary responsibility. In our view, the efficiency of the Security Council can be achieved by improving its representativeness, legitimacy, transparency and accountability and by restricting the right of veto to issues of substance, as provided for by the United Nations Charter.

The Republic of Moldova shares the view that the reform of the United Nations system will be successful only if the reform of the Security Council is followed by the reform of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. We support the momentum created for revitalizing the Assembly and strengthening the coordinating functions of the Economic and Social Council in the social and economic fields. Effective coordination among the three main bodies is essential if we want to address comprehensively the urgent problems of today's world.

In the new circumstances, the United Nations should continue to improve its capacity in the field of peacekeeping, which is an important instrument for the maintenance of international peace and security. We support actions aimed at enhancing the United Nations rapid deployment capabilities through its standby arrangements. I would like to mention that Moldova has committed itself to contribute troops to the United Nations Standby Arrangements System through yesterday's signing at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of a formal document in that regard. The Republic of Moldova is already present in United Nations peacekeeping efforts, with military observers and staff officers in United Nations missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. We are determined to continue to support United Nations activities in this area.

It is crucial to further strengthen the United Nations anti-terrorist legal framework. The Republic of Moldova fully supports the current efforts to conclude a convention for the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism and a comprehensive international convention on international terrorism.

I would like to commend the Secretary-General for his many initiatives to make the Organization more effective. The creation of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change is another important step in that direction. Like other Member States, the Republic of Moldova looks forward to concrete recommendations from the Panel on how to tackle contemporary threats, including new ones such as intra-State conflicts, terrorism and separatism.

We cannot realistically expect to win the war against international terrorism as long as regional and internal conflicts remain unsolved and their root causes not properly addressed. Recently, terrorism has increasingly been merging with separatism. Many terrorists and international criminals have found a safe haven in the regions affected by internal conflicts and secessionist tendencies.

In this context, I would like to add my voice to those who have repeatedly warned in recent years of the danger posed by aggressive separatism. Separatism provides fertile ground for various extremist forces and terrorist groups. It has become one of the main sources of internal conflicts and regional instability. To ignore it would have tragic consequences for numerous countries of a multi-ethnic composition.

Regretfully, separatism continues to be the main obstacle to consolidating the independence and statehood of the Republic of Moldova. Over the years, the Republic of Moldova has systematically informed the relevant international organizations of the danger that the political conflict in its eastern region poses to regional and international peace and security. The settlement of the conflict has become the country's absolute priority. The initiatives put forward by the Republic of Moldova in recent years reflect the determination and political will of Moldovan authorities to resolve this political conflict peacefully, on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. In particular, I would like to underline the initiative of the President of the Republic of Moldova, Mr. Vladimir Voronin, on the establishment of the Joint Constitutional Commission charged with drafting a new constitution.

Despite the constructive approach by Moldovan authorities in their dialogue with the self-appointed Transdniestrian leaders and other participants in the multilateral framework of negotiations, developments have demonstrated the inefficiency of these negotiations. It has also become obvious that the separatist leaders do not sincerely wish for the country's reintegration. In this regard, I should mention, among other things, the recent closure of Moldovan schools that use Latin script, the inhumane treatment of children and ethnic discrimination.

This region remains an area rife with the illegal manufacture and traffick of arms. Given the porousness of the Transdniestrian section of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, there are no guarantees that the illegally manufactured or trafficked armaments will not reach other conflicts zones in the future.

We are also deeply concerned about the human rights situation in the area controlled by separatist forces. The separatist regime has systematically violated most human rights, including the right of association, the right to a fair trial, freedom from torture, freedom of movement and, especially, the right to education. All of these human rights violations hinder the democratization process within the region.

At the same time, we have encountered a biased attitude on the part of the involved parties, reflected in the support for smuggling and in the obvious violations of existing bilateral and international agreements. We deem it necessary to modify the components of the peacekeeping mechanism and to replace it with a new one under an international mandate.

Considering that the interests of regional stability and security require an objective and impartial approach, it is necessary to ensure full respect for international law and democratic standards. More importantly, any geopolitical and geo-economic interest in maintaining the status-quo needs to be abandoned. Strict implementation of the decisions taken at the 1999 Istanbul Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe would harmoniously fit such an approach.

Also, as has already been mentioned during the current debate, we must exclude the practice of applying double standards when dealing with internal conflicts and the means for their settlement.

The reintegration of the country and consolidation of democratic values within its entire territory are essential conditions for the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. It is in this context that the President of the Republic of Moldova has launched an initiative on a stability and security pact for Moldova. This document is aimed at ensuring consensus among the parties concerned, in order to guarantee the development of an independent, sovereign and integral Moldovan State. We believe that holding an international conference on this issue should be the next step in initiating the debate on the measures to follow. This situation demonstrates the international character of the problem, as well as the inefficiency of existing regional settlement mechanisms.

Today, the main challenges for the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields stem from world trends, such as globalization and increasing ecological interdependence, and from persistent factors such as widespread poverty and severe social inequalities between and within States. They should be addressed by a strengthened global partnership between industrialized countries, developing countries, countries with transitional economies and intergovernmental institutions.

The Millennium Development Goals remain the most significant objectives agreed to by the international community, as they cover the areas of major concern for the peoples of the world. It is therefore of utmost importance to achieve the Goals, as well as other specific developmental targets set subsequently by several major United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields. In this context, we welcome the decision of the General Assembly, adopted at its last session, to hold in September 2005 a high-level meeting that will undertake a comprehensive review of the progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals, as well as a review of the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits.

This review is necessary, given the overall slow pace of implementation. We share the concerns expressed in this respect by many States, in particular by the countries sponsoring the world leaders' New York Declaration on the Action against Hunger and Poverty, which was adopted on 20 September. Like them, we believe that if resolute and urgent action is not taken, the Millennium Development Goals will not be reached by 2015 in some regions of the world.

We should not forget, in this context, about the grave social and economic problems that affect crisis-stricken countries and countries with special needs, in particular landlocked countries. Creating an enabling environment for sustainable development is a challenge for them and, therefore, they should be further assisted by the United Nations system and the donor community.

I would like to reiterate, in conclusion, my country's commitment to the Organization and its willingness to cooperate with other Member States in order to achieve the noble goals and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Laurie Chan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands.

Mr. Chan (Solomon Islands): At the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Government and people of Solomon Islands, to convey to you our warm and sincere congratulations on your election as President of this session of the United Nations General Assembly. May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, our colleague, the Honourable Julian Hunte, Foreign Minister of Saint Lucia, for his able and sterling stewardship in making the Assembly's fifty-eighth session proactive and responsive to the challenges it has faced over the last 12 months.

I also wish to express our deep appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his focused leadership in steering the work of the Secretariat through difficult and sometimes uncharted waters over the past year.

Only four years into the new millennium, the complexity of ongoing and new challenges has redefined the international system, resulting in uncertainty and imbalances in certain parts of the globe. Ensuing debates over multilateralism versus unilateralism in the resolution of crisis situations have epitomized the complex nature of events during the past year. This makes the call two years ago by our Secretary-General for institutional reforms more urgent now than ever before.

Solomon Islands looks forward to the recommendations of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, in particular, to proposals that will revitalize and give new momentum to the United Nations. These reforms must ensure that the United Nations is flexible and responsive to the needs of our time. To this end, Solomon Islands fully supports the proposed enlargement of the Council and reaffirms its call for Japan and Germany to become permanent members of the Council. We believe that the enlargement should affect both the permanent and non-permanent membership categories. It is also our fervent hope and desire to see that the Secretariat reflects the diversity of its membership. In this regard, while it should continue to recruit the best available candidates, opportunities within the Secretariat must be made available to small island countries on the basis of in-country, rather than externally conducted, assessment examinations.

As you are aware, this year the United Nations family marked the tenth anniversary of the ethnic genocide in Rwanda. The occasion called on the United Nations to play a more proactive role towards ensuring that such tragic events are never allowed to happen again.

No more than four years ago, my own country, Solomon Islands, experienced the hardship of a conflict situation when tensions erupted between two of the many ethnic groups in the country. In response, Solomon Islands sought assistance from every possible institution, including the Security Council. In this regard, I am pleased to say that my region, through the Pacific Islands Forum under its security mechanism as enshrined in the Biketawa Declaration, responded to that "911" call.

The Pacific Islands Forum regional security mechanism is in harmony with the spirit of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), led by our bigger regional neighbour, Australia, strongly supported by New Zealand and other Pacific Islands Forum member countries, went beyond the mere restoration of law and order and security. In a spirit of Pacific cooperation and partnership between Solomon Islands and Pacific Islands Forum member countries, a long-term approach of strengthening the country's State institutions was set in place, thus allowing the process of healing, reconstruction, rehabilitation and nation-building to continue the course of unifying the country and its less than half a million, but diverse, inhabitants, who speak some 80 different local languages.

The success of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in promptly stabilizing the country within a period of three months, collecting some 3,700 weapons without a shot being fired, presents a fine example of the importance of regional cooperation in resolving conflict situations. On this note, I wish to pay tribute to all our Pacific neighbours and to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Commission for Human Rights, the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Union (EU), the Republic of China, Japan, the United Kingdom, the International Red Cross and the civil society; they have assisted and are continuing to assist in the process of our country's ongoing recovery and rehabilitation.

I must also underscore my belief and conviction that in order for peace to be achieved it must be desired; moreover, I would add, there must be a workable mechanism to ensure its realization and sustenance. In this regard, my Government is fully convinced that the positive results of our partnership with RAMSI could be sustained through our recently adopted National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan (NERRDP), which provides a blueprint for an integrated process of development and nation-building for the common good of our people.

I am further convinced, that the Pacific Plan recently adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum leaders in Apia, Samoa, represents a regional road map for cooperation that could complement national efforts aimed at building an improved and secure livelihood for the diverse people of the region. Through its creation of stronger and deeper links between countries in the region and resource-sharing, including governance and aligning of policies, the Pacific Plan could assist our countries to address challenges and issues that sovereign member States may lack the ability and capacity to address individually as a result of our countries' smallness and inherent limitations caused by economies of scale.

Solomon Islands notes the positive developments that have taken place in the peace process on Bougainville. We recognize the important role played by the United Nations in the peace process there and would urge its continuing involvement to see the process through. Solomon Islands, for its part, has signed a number of bilateral agreements with Papua New Guinea, which will support the good work that has already been undertaken towards peace.

On the issue of Palestine, my delegation subscribes to the view that the resolution of the Middle East conflict can only be possible through negotiations. It is in this spirit that we call upon all parties to abide by the Quartet's road map for peace, and we urge a halt to all acts of aggression.

Turning to the global fight against terrorism, the recent terrorist attacks, especially in Iraq, Indonesia, and the Beslan school in southern Russia manifest the continuing menace and evil of terrorism at large. We have witnessed many innocent lives, including those of women and children, being lost due to these senseless terror attacks. My delegation offers its deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones during these unforgivable incidents. Solomon Islands condemns in the strongest possible terms such acts of terror and fully support international efforts to combat this scourge. In this regard, I wish to join others in calling on the global community to support small States to build their national capacities towards ongoing efforts aimed at combating transnational crimes, such as arms smuggling, drug trafficking, people smuggling, money laundering and terrorism.

The United Nations Charter promotes the economic and social progress of Member States, especially those facing special development problems. For a country recovering from a post-conflict situation, Solomon Islands considers international frameworks such as the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, and the Barbados Programme of Action for Small Island Developing States as vehicles for enhancing peace and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Solomon Islands is a small island developing State and a least developed country, where its development challenges are multifaceted in nature. Unfortunately, the level of international cooperation envisaged for the Programmes either have not materialized or have been minimal. Despite this, my Government is undertaking reforms that include the appointment of a national focal point for the Brussels Programme of Action. Hence, we are hopeful that, with better coordination, Solomon Islands can take full advantage of and maximize all opportunities the Programme has to offer.

The issue of debt-servicing continues to present challenges, and even obstacles, to the development programmes of many poor developing States. Debt burdens continue to divert attention in national budgets away from the development of necessary infrastructures and the delivery of basic and essential social services. Solomon Islands therefore calls on the international community to give greater attention to debt issues.

Solomon Islands attaches much importance to the Millennium Development Goals, and these have been mainstreamed into our NERRDP. While we will use the 2005 high-level event mentioned in the Secretary General's 2004 report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals to take stock of our progress, we are confident that NERRDP can serve as a road map for the medium to long-term implementation of our commitments. NERRDP provides a useful framework within which important issues, such as economic and institutional reform, good governance, upholding of democracy and its values of freedom, and respect for the basic principles of human rights can be nurtured and harnessed for the betterment and improvement of the livelihood of our people and society, including the sustenance of peace in our country.

Solomon Islands would like to pay closer attention to the emerging health threats it faces. In particular, malaria remains the predominant cause of death of among children in Solomon Islands. The lack of data on HIV/AIDS presents a threat to the country and has the potential of creating a devastating impact on its economy and social structure. With the support of WHO, the Global Fund to fight AIDS and Japan, we are determined to put in place appropriate preventive actions.

Solomon Islands, which is geographically scattered across some 1,800 kilometres, comprising almost 1,000 small islands and atolls, has an agriculture-based economy that is dependent on the environment. Sustainable management of resources is essential for guaranteeing the security of future generations.

The hurricanes that hit the southern United States, the Bahamas, Grenada, Haiti and Jamaica in the Caribbean in the recent past; cyclone Heita, which devastated Niue in 2003; flooding in Fiji; and continuous heavy rains in Solomon Islands all bring home the stark reality of our world's vulnerability to natural disasters. We realize the great difficulty and pain that smaller island developing States face in mitigating the magnitude and impact of such disasters. To this end, we extend our condolences and sympathy for the loss of life and property caused by the recent hurricanes in Grenada and Haiti and would urge the international community to assist in relief efforts to those who are affected.

Generally, Solomon Islands strongly feels that more could be done by the international community towards safeguarding our environment. Hence, we acknowledge the partnership of the Global Fund in assisting environmental programmes globally, and we would encourage that the focus of further assistance should extend to other sectors of sustainable development, such as energy, water and sanitation.

My delegation has closely followed the review of the Barbados Programme of Action and the development of a Group of 77 strategy paper. While negotiations are still ongoing, Solomon Islands, as a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), acknowledges that the strategy paper strengthens the Barbados Programme and places it as an action-oriented programme with which we can all identify. We are hopeful the Mauritius meeting will revitalize our efforts towards protecting the environment and enhancing sustainable development.

Trade remains a significant source of economic growth and development for many developing States. Regionally, Pacific island countries have gradually begun the process of regional integration. South-South trade cooperation among Forum island countries culminated in the entry into force of the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement last year, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group trade agreement is being reviewed with a view to further broadening its scope and its markets 10 years after its inception. The Pacific members of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States are negotiating an economic partnership agreement with the European Union in the framework of the Cotonou Agreement. Those developments manifest continuing preparations by small island developing economies in the Pacific Islands Forum region for gradual adaptation into the broader process of the globalization of the world economy.

Solomon Islands notes that the eleventh session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, convened in June this year in São Paulo, built confidence and consensus on ongoing multilateral trade negotiations. Solomon Islands supports that process and urges making it more participatory and inclusive so that no one is left behind, especially the small and vulnerable island developing economies and the least developed countries. We are mindful of the need to recognize the inherent structural problems of geographical size, isolation from markets and the constraints resulting from a lack of supply-side capacities and economies of scale, especially in the case of small island developing States such as Solomon Islands. However, as a member of the World Trade Organization, we are pleased that the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations embraces a development dimension, in particular the recognition of the principle of special and differential treatment, in its work programme on small island developing economies.

One of the principles of the United Nations Charter is to open membership to all States that accept their Charter obligations. The Republic of China on Taiwan has registered its interest in being part of the United Nations family. Solomon Islands once again calls for the Republic of China to be made a full Member of the United Nations. Solomon Islands enjoys warm and cordial relations with the Republic of China and is mindful of the threats facing the world today. Threats such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) are transnational and transborder in nature and require the cooperation and engagement of all countries of the world. To deny one country the right to participate weakens global mechanisms and jeopardizes the security of all.

The Republic of China on Taiwan is democratic, and its vibrant economy is ranked seventeenth globally. It has the third largest foreign exchange reserves. Its development experience offers important lessons on the need to embrace freedom, respect for the basic principles of human rights, respect for freedom of the press and the uninhibited functioning of democratic institutions. The Republic of China's ability and capacity to contribute to strengthening the United Nations should be seriously considered, especially at a time when the Organization could do with all the help it can receive.

Solomon Islands calls upon the Assembly to find a process that will allow the Republic of China on Taiwan to become a full and equal Member of the United Nations. The Pacific Islands Forum has a mechanism that engages both Chinas in our dialogue process, and we have continuously benefited from that rich interaction.

To conclude, I call upon the Assembly to get real and confront the increasingly varied and complex challenges we face today. The purpose and the role of the United Nations are ultimately to create a peaceful, just and prosperous world that offers hope to all. That requires making the Organization flexible, innovative and responsive to ever-changing global demands. Thus, the onus is on us to make bold and tough decisions that breathe new life into our Organization.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency the Honourable Jaya Krishna Cuttaree, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Regional Cooperation of the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr. Cuttaree (Mauritius): Mr. President, I bring you the greetings and the best wishes of the Government and people of Mauritius. It is also a matter of pride and honour to see you preside over this premier world institution. That honour is not only recognition of the contribution of your country, Gabon, in world affairs but also a great moment for our continent, Africa. We are confident that, with your wide experience and vast diplomatic skills, you will successfully steer the work of the Assembly. My delegation pledges its full support to you during your tenure.

My delegation would also like to place on record our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his able and excellent leadership of the General

Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. As fellow islanders, we derived great satisfaction and pride from his unequalled stewardship. He assumed and discharged the high responsibilities of President of the Assembly with commitment, dedication and great diplomacy. We thank him for his service to the world community.

Allow me also to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his relentless efforts and determination to ensure that our Organization continues to play its role effectively in the international arena.

This session of the General Assembly is taking place as we prepare ourselves to tackle and face major challenges and developments over the next 12 months. Of particular importance to small island developing States such as my own, 2005 will begin with two major events: the International Meeting for the full and comprehensive review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, which will be hosted by Mauritius; and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, to be held in Japan.

Ten years after Barbados, small island developing States continue to face practically the same challenges in their drive to achieve sustainable development. Their small size, fragile ecosystems, geographic isolation and limited resources, compounded by the threats of climate change, rising sea levels and natural disasters, make them particularly vulnerable. While it is a fact that many developing countries face the increasing pressures posed by the combined forces of globalization and trade liberalization, such pressures are even more exacerbating for small island developing States. Their small markets and the limited market access for their products constrain them greatly in their efforts to integrate smoothly into the global economy. They also suffer from natural vulnerabilities to phenomena such as hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis. The devastation caused by the recent series of hurricanes in the Caribbean islands demonstrates the extent of our vulnerability. It is true that those vulnerabilities have been recognized in a variety of international forums, but such recognition has yet to crystallize in concrete actions in favour of small island developing States. The precarious situation of our States is of direct concern to the international community as a whole.

May we then resolve to take bold initiatives to implement meaningfully the Barbados Programme and to respond to related emerging issues so that small island developing States can build resilience and capacity and be integrated fully into the global economy? Similarly, in the multilateral trading system, we expect the emergence of an environment conducive to enabling our States to improve their competitiveness, their market access and the diversification of their economies. We therefore expect the World Trade Organization to soon establish a work programme for small economies.

As a small island developing State, Mauritius is indeed honoured to host the International Meeting. The International Meeting should be not only a collective gathering to reflect on the specificities of our concerns. It should also be a landmark in the history of the major United Nations conferences, with deliverable outcomes and the means necessary for their implementation.

We in Mauritius are leaving no stone unturned to make that event truly historic and memorable. It is important that the entire international community participate in that meeting, which, allow me to point out, is a United Nations meeting on small island development States and not a meeting for those States alone.

(*spoke in French*)

The work to be undertaken by the small island developing States is based upon sustainable development and the restricted resources available to those countries. How can one not welcome, therefore, the decision taken by the Government of Burkina Faso, host of the next summit of la Francophonie, which has chosen solidarity and sustainable development as the theme of the summit.

Our preoccupation with sustainable development — the basis of the Johannesburg Summit — is even stronger in the context of globalization today. Although only a handful of developing island States are French-speaking, we trust that the Summit will highlight the need for us to find, within the international community, ways and means to help small island developing States, which may then become models for sustainable development.

(*spoke in English*)

Global warming, and its related effects on climate change, is now an undisputed reality, and islands suffer the brunt of it, even though — let me emphasize this — we are the least responsible for the cause. We believe that the Kyoto Protocol is the most appropriate mechanism for global action now and in the future, to address the issue of global warming. We call, therefore, for its ratification and entry into force, as soon as possible.

Africa, home to 34 of the world's 48 poorest countries, remains an enormous challenge for the United Nations. The deadly spread of HIV and AIDS continues to claim a devastating toll on the continent, particularly in southern Africa. We in Africa are committed to further democratize our societies and give our people a rightful voice in the decision-making process. That is why at the continental level, we are doing all we can, despite our scarce resources, to consolidate the African Union and make it central in our collective bid to grapple with the development concerns of our region. Using that perspective, we have come up with our own home-grown programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in order to attain the ultimate goal that we have fixed for ourselves — the total integration of Africa.

Since we launched the African Union Peace and Security Council last May, we have received encouraging support from some of our development partners. I should like to use this platform to urge the international community to support the African Union in that field to enable it to come to grips with the conflicts that continue to divert our attention and meagre resources from our development efforts.

In addressing the issue of conflicts on the continent, the African Union has amply demonstrated that it means business, and any assistance it gets from the international community can only help it to achieve its goals. But let me hasten to say that the African Union's involvement in peace processes should not distract the United Nations Security Council from its primary responsibility to maintain peace and security in Africa. Indeed, the Security Council should not allow itself to be perceived as being selective in its approach with regard to conflicts in various parts of the world. Experiences in the Great Lakes region and in West Africa have shown that the combined efforts of the Security Council and the African Union can bring tangible results.

Before I leave this part of my statement, let me refer to the unjust treatment that continues to be meted out to the Saharawi people who are still struggling for their right to self-determination. It is the duty of this world body to ensure a speedy conclusion of that matter. In this regard, my delegation reiterates its support for the Settlement Plan and any other political initiative acceptable to the parties concerned that will help to take the process forward for a durable and sustainable solution. The Saharawi people deserve that commitment from us.

As this Assembly is aware, Mauritius has always favoured a bilateral approach in our resolve to restore our exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago which, prior to independence from the United Kingdom, was unlawfully detached from our territory, in violation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples contained in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), and Assembly resolutions 2066 (XX), 2232 (XXI) and 2357 (XXII). Such bilateral approaches have unfortunately not yielded any result so far and certain recent regrettable unilateral actions by the United Kingdom have not been helpful.

While we shall continue to favour a settlement of the matter through dialogue, we shall use all avenues open to us in order to exercise our full sovereign rights over the Chagos Archipelago. The Assembly should also note that this issue has a tragic human dimension. Before Mauritius acceded to its independence, all the inhabitants of the Chagos were forced to leave the land of their birth, where they had lived for several generations. The plight of those inhabitants must now be comprehensively addressed.

In the same context, my delegation looks forward to the resumption of dialogue with the French Government over Tromelin island.

Mauritius is a firm believer and, indeed, a keen player in regional cooperation and integration, not as an end in itself but as a sure means to enable us to integrate the global economy. We consider regional cooperation as a necessary step to enable Africa to benefit from globalization. We have therefore spared no effort to promote regional cooperation. Since the early 1980s we in Mauritius, have been playing a pro-active role in advancing the objectives of the Abuja Treaty. Mauritius is a very active member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and of the South African Development Community (SADC).

As the new Chair of SADC, we look forward to working very closely with all our fellow member States in advancing the objectives of the organization, promoting community building through regional integration and aligning national policies for regional cooperation so that they stay on course in the globalization process. We will also endeavour to forge a strong relationship between SADC and its development partners as well as with other subregional, continental and multilateral organizations.

After the failure of the WTO Ministerial Conference at Cancún, the successful outcome of the July 2004 General Council meeting has come as a ray of hope to put the trade talks back on track. The July package of frameworks and other agreements that the WTO members approved will greatly enhance the chances for a successful completion of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations.

We therefore welcome the decision adopted by the WTO General Council to fulfil the development dimensions of the Doha Development Agenda, which places the needs and interests of developing and least developed countries at the heart of the Doha Agenda work programme.

In that context, let me make an appeal for a meaningful synergy to be established among the development agencies and other United Nations institutions, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in order to ensure that developing countries develop their capacity to increase their share of world trade as a necessary pathway to prosperity.

The situation in the Middle East remains extremely preoccupying for all freedom-loving nations and peoples. We go on speaking of the need for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, without realizing that each year the peace and security situation in the region is growing worse.

Over the past year, we witnessed more targeted assassinations, increased terrorist acts, daily recriminations from both sides and an expansion of settlement activities. The illegal construction of a wall by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories has worsened an already complex situation.

Almost two years ago the road map called for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by 2005. The year 2005 is at our doorstep and we are still grappling with how to put the derailed peace process back on track. We believe that the road map remains the only viable option for peace in the region. We call on both Israel and Palestine to exercise maximum restraint, undertake confidence-building measures and create the appropriate environment, with the help of the Quartet, to implement the road map.

My delegation believes that what is needed today is not a wall, but a political solution and a renewed commitment from the international community that would resolve the conflict altogether. Only the creation of the much-awaited Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel with secured and recognized borders, can bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

The political process in Iraq reached an important milestone last June with the handing over of authority to the Iraqi Interim Government. My delegation believes that the holding of national elections early next year, as required by Security Council resolution 1546 (2004), will give the people of Iraq a unique opportunity to take the destiny of their country into their own hands. However, the current security situation in Iraq is very disturbing. My delegation condemns all acts of violence that can disrupt Iraq's political and economic transition. The international community must be fully engaged in its efforts to rebuild a safe, democratic and peaceful Iraq.

Given the potential threat posed by nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, it is a matter of serious concern that we still have not been able to find common ground to initiate a process leading to complete disarmament. Significant differences still persist among parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We once again appeal to all Member States to translate their stated commitments to the cause of disarmament into action.

Mauritius supports and implements fully the international disarmament treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and has always supported the various United Nations resolutions related to the consolidation of those regimes, including resolution 1540 (2004), which focuses on non-proliferation issues.

Along with our fight against weapons of mass destruction, we should also stay the course against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, which have been the weapons of choice in recent conflicts, particularly in Africa.

Terrorist acts continue to create fear and havoc among peaceful nations and lead to the loss of lives, particularly among innocent civilians, including women and children. We should therefore reflect on the effectiveness of the international response to terrorism. It is becoming increasingly evident that the war against international terrorism cannot be won by military might alone. Several reports submitted to this Assembly have already amply demonstrated that problems such as poverty, social inequality, unemployment and illiteracy constitute breeding grounds for terrorism. Genuine international cooperation is therefore needed to comprehensively address the root causes of terrorism.

Allow me to share some thoughts with respect to the future of our Organization. The world emerged from the Second World War resolved to ensure peace among nations, and the United Nations was born with that vision firmly in mind. Now, more than half a century later, in full recognition of the drastic and far-reaching changes that have transformed our world, there is full consensus for a reform of our Organization.

There is indeed general agreement that the current structure of the Security Council needs to be reviewed to reflect the new realities of the world. We firmly believe that a greater commitment has to be demonstrated by every member of the Organization in order to reach an agreement on a reformed Security Council based on wider representation, transparency and equitable geographical distribution with the inclusion of developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America as permanent members. Here, let me reiterate our conviction that India fully deserves to have that status. In that respect, I need to underscore the need for small island States, which are scattered over all the oceans of the world, to have an adequate voice in the Council.

It is therefore our sincere hope that the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the Secretary-General will make concrete and practical recommendations to make the United Nations more credible and responsive to the expectations of people in every corner of the globe. The high-level plenary meeting, which is to be held next year, would also be an opportunity for us to take stock of progress made in respect to the goals set in the major United Nations conferences and summits.

Mauritius continues to be an active supporter of the United Nations in its efforts to save succeeding generations from war and suffering and to promote social progress and better standards of life. Mauritius believes that a strengthened United Nations, evolving within the framework of a credible multilateral system, is the only effective instrument at the disposal of the international community to bring order and ensure the coherence of international economic, social and environmental policies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Right Honourable Sir Rabbie L. Namaliu, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Namaliu (Papua New Guinea): My delegation warmly welcomes you to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and pledges our support. We acknowledge that you are also from our Forum of Small States group and therefore share our common problems and challenges. Please convey my delegation's commendation to your predecessor, the Honourable Julian Hunte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, for his strong leadership of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his staff for the good work they continue to do for our global community.

We currently live in a changing world, one which past generations would even be amazed at. One of the greatest achievements of the United Nations system is the process of decolonization which has seen more than 70 countries, including my own, take their rightful place in this Assembly. The process will not be complete, however, until the remaining 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories, including New Caledonia and Tokelau, have exercised their inalienable right to self-determination.

The world continues to witness great leaps in technology, but at the same time we have also seen an increase in some global dilemmas — poverty and hunger, the ravages of HIV/AIDS, wars, conflicts and terrorism, among others.

Each of our countries face numerous challenges in this changing world and many of them are common to all of us, regardless of our size, location and status as developed or developing countries. Under the circumstances, and more than ever before, we need to work together as a community of nations to help each other address those challenges. Nowhere is that more evident than in the domain of international peace and security. A terrorist act committed in one State today also affects others elsewhere in the global community.

We condemn the recent tragedy in Beslan, Russia, the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the ongoing terrorist acts in the Middle East, Iraq, and other parts of the world. We also condemn the recent tragedy in Darfur, the Sudan, and commend Canada and Japan for their generous assistance.

In circumstances like the foregoing, those most affected are innocent civilians, especially women and children. We therefore support the Secretary-General's efforts to rally the international community to subscribe to the treaties on the protection of civilians.

In many cases, terrorists also take the lives of United Nations and other humanitarian workers who are doing unselfish and dedicated work under difficult circumstances to serve our common humanity. In that regard, we urge all Member States to support the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

The situation in the Middle East remains intractable, requiring constant and deliberate attention by the United Nations, especially by the Security Council. Our own experience in the Bougainville conflict has taught us that there can be peace if all parties really desire it and are willing to resolve their differences. We therefore urge all parties to the conflict in the Middle East — including Israel and Palestine, as well as the major players, particularly the Quartet — to formulate a peace plan that is mutually acceptable to all.

Papua New Guinea concurs with Secretary-General Kofi Annan's recent statement to the Assembly at its 3rd meeting, which highlighted how important it is for the rule of law to prevail if we are to achieve peace and security in the world.

Like many other Member States, Papua New Guinea has acceded to the various counter-terrorism treaties, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). We believe that the reporting obligations under the provisions of those treaties should be streamlined to include regional reports, which would solve many capacity issues for small nations with limited resources. Because many of our regional legal, military and law enforcement agencies meet regularly, those meetings could provide the opportunity to compile regional reports on our fight against international terrorism. We believe that there is every desire to fulfil treaty obligations; but if some of the more onerous tasks can be lightened for the small countries through regional reports, bodies like the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Security Council, the General Assembly and other related agencies could be better served.

The small States are doing their best to fulfil their obligations. Like many other Members States, we take seriously our responsibilities and obligations to fight the scourge of international terrorism and related issues including the trafficking of people.

The Pacific region advocates that the United Nations continue to closely and seriously study the notion of collective security along with collective action, ideas upon which many of our actions to bring stability to our region continue to be based.

We are custodians of the biggest ocean and its resources. Papua New Guinea, in particular, is endowed with 5 to 7 per cent of the world's biodiversity. We therefore share a common responsibility to ensure the protection and conservation of those resources which are of vital importance to humanity.

We encourage sustainable logging practices in order to avoid the denuding of our vast rainforest resources. We condemn destructive fishing methods and urge all Member States to adhere to sustainable management and conservation regimes in order to meet future demands.

At the Pacific Islands Forum, our leaders recently adopted a new vision for the Pacific region in the form of the Pacific Plan, which embraces four key areas: economic growth, sustainable development, security and good governance.

The Pacific Islands Forum will be engaging with the European Union and other development partners to advance the interests of the region, especially those of economic growth and sustainable development.

I share the view enunciated by other speakers that there can be no security without development, and that equally, there can be no development without peace and security. As important links, both need to be addressed simultaneously if we want peace and sustainable development to prevail.

We are pleased to see regional solidarity and assistance in conflict situations bear good results in Bougainville and in our neighbour, the Solomon Islands. We also note that other regional actions taken by our leaders, such as the establishment of the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre in Fiji, enhance law enforcement and intelligence sharing in the region.

Concerning good governance, our leaders encouraged Pacific Member Governments to sign and ratify the United Nations Convention against Corruption in accordance with the spirit of the Biketawa Declaration.

Over the past several years, Papua New Guinea has been the beneficiary of regional and international assistance in the rebuilding and return to normalcy of the island of Bougainville, after a decade-long conflict. We thank the members of the Security Council, both past and present, for their goodwill, patience and understanding in what has been an extremely painful experience for us. We have appreciated the support and counsel of each member of the Council throughout that important process. The conflict has greatly affected our nation and we have learned many lessons. We are re-establishing the rule of law in a profound and thorough constitutional process which will result in a democratically elected autonomous government for the people of Bougainville. While we are close to achieving that, we are equally mindful that each step taken now to finalize and consolidate the Bougainville constitution is critically important for the autonomous government of Bougainville to be sustained successfully.

We continue to receive valuable support and assistance for the peace process from the Secretary-General as well as from our Pacific neighbours: Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Rebuilding and restoration of services in Bougainville has been greatly assisted by our development partners, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, among others. We thank them all and look forward to their continued support and cooperation.

We continue to be concerned about the security and vulnerability of many of our small island States. As noted and endorsed by Pacific leaders at the recent Pacific Islands Forum Summit in Samoa, the forthcoming International Meeting on the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action, to be held in Mauritius in 2005, will provide an opportunity to discuss with our development partners the many issues which confront small island States, including those in our subregion.

Development of women and children through sports must have a special place in our quest to improve the socio-economic well-being of our people. We are also working hard to implement the Millennium Development Goals and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to have devastating consequences in many developing countries. Our leaders in the Pacific region have endorsed a regional strategy for HIV/AIDS noting the need to address the issue urgently.

Small arms and light weapons will always threaten the stability of many small States. Therefore, we look forward to the continuing work towards a United-Nations-supported action plan for dealing with small arms.

Climate change is a threat to all humankind and therefore deserves the attention of the international community, which must work together to address it. We are appreciative of the position of the United Kingdom as underlined by Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Tony Blair, in a recent statement highlighting the threat of sea level rise and related issues. I am aware that there are scientific studies being carried out, but the real issue is that the effects of climate change and global warming are being felt daily by many island States. We in Papua New Guinea are no more immune to climate change and sea level rise than are many other small island States. The island communities in Papua New Guinea, like those of our neighbouring countries in the Pacific, are being affected adversely by sea level rise. We empathize with our colleagues from many other island States which continually suffer from the effects of the problem. Our plight is further compounded by natural disasters, including the ravages of hurricanes, cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods and tsunamis.

In that context, our sympathies go to the peoples and the Governments of the Caribbean region, especially those of Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, among others, as well as to the inhabitants of cities and towns of the southern states of the United States of America, which have been devastated by the recent hurricanes.

As a global community we must pool our resources and consider ways of mitigating the adverse effects of climate change in order to help those States which are vulnerable. We applaud the intention of the Russian Federation to consider becoming a party to the Kyoto Protocol and urge others to recognize their responsibility to the global community by doing the same.

We look forward to the final report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change appointed by the Secretary-General, which will form the basis for high-level discussions on United Nations reforms, including the expansion and composition of the Security Council. We believe Council membership should be expanded in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories to take into account the lack of sufficient representation of developing countries in the Asia-Pacific, African and Latin American regions. We also believe that Japan and Germany should be seriously considered for permanent membership, with equal privileges and obligations. Consideration may be given to other countries with appropriate qualifications and integrity, particularly from the developing world.

We also commend the indications from the Panel that the definition of "hard" versus "soft" threats is no longer relevant. That will allow a proper and objective discussion to be held, given that the resonance of perceived threats can be viewed differently depending on where the threat is.

That said, Papua New Guinea believes that reform of the United Nations system should be comprehensive and that the General Assembly should regain its pre-eminent role as the principal organ of the United Nations. That will enable all Member States, large and small, to engage more meaningfully in addressing all challenges in an effective way in order to help the United Nations fulfil its role in the pursuit of a peaceful, just and prosperous world. That is the purpose for which the United Nations was established.

As we move towards next year's review of the Millennium Development Goals and the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations, we should all look at the dire needs of the majority of humanity. My delegation believes that the Millennium Development Goals provide the blueprint for achieving those objectives.

Finally, let me conclude by reaffirming Papua New Guinea's support for the one-China policy, which provides the sound basis for our bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency the Honourable Barak Sope Mautamate, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Mr. Mautamate (Vanuatu): I bring to this gathering a warm greeting from the people of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Mr. President, at the outset, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I also take this occasion to acknowledge with deep gratitude the contributions of your predecessor, who so competently steered the work of the fifty-eighth session to its conclusion.

Here, I must also acknowledge the outstanding role of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has been resolute in his efforts to revitalize the Organization's ability to address global concerns. My delegation reaffirms its support for Mr. Annan's profound and meticulous leadership of the United Nations.

I also take this opportunity to convey the condolences of my Government and the people of Vanuatu to the people of the Caribbean nations, in particular Haiti, for the loss of so many lives and for the extensive damage caused by the destructive forces of nature that recently swept through the region. We offer them our moral support and pray that the affected peoples will soon recover and that the devastated areas of their nations will be swiftly rehabilitated and rebuilt. Those inevitable natural calamities demonstrate once more the extreme and particular vulnerability of island States, which seriously affects national economies.

Every year, from this rostrum, we reaffirm our faith and confidence in upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter. We entered the new millennium with much anticipation and hope of creating a just and better world for all our citizens. However, global insecurity and the varying dimensions of serious conflict have created a frightening situation. It is to be expected that the world will plunge into further turmoil unless the role of the United Nations — the only truly global body — is reinvigorated and recovers its legitimate responsibility of addressing the causes of conflict and maintaining peace and security. I come to the Assembly with some trepidation, as I see our world spiralling out of control unless its Members uphold the universality of the United Nations decision-making process in addressing global concerns.

The world is at a crossroads and we meet here at a critical juncture. Around us, civil strife, wars, poverty, disease, famine, drought, natural disasters, terrorism, environmental degradation, depletion of land and marine resources and other phenomena are ravaging the world. The displacement of peoples from their natural habitats and the sacrilege of human suffering in many parts of the world demonstrate that unless immediate remedial strategies are implemented, the global situation will continue to deteriorate.

Moreover, the emergence of conflict in areas we once believed stable, the deterioration of law and order and the senseless killing of innocent peoples are painful reminders that we need to rethink our policies and decisions. Globalization has brought with it both opportunities and challenges, but for the small island States the challenges are much more ominous. Those are the realities.

Those negative developments lead me to conclude that the United Nations is indispensable and that we all need to work as friends and equal partners. Globalization has brought nations together. We are interlinked and interdependent. That demands global cooperation and governance from all responsible Members of the Organization. Understandably, there are the vested interests of the powerful, but that only necessitates genuine cooperation and goodwill to achieve convergence of those interests. The United Nations role in that regard must remain fundamental in order to ensure compatibility with the international legal framework. Maverick policies and decisions will only create further divisions and hostility.

With that in mind, I believe there is now consensus on introducing far-reaching reforms that make the United Nations relevant for all its Members, with the fundamental objective of preserving international peace, security and stability.

My Government fully supports efforts to reform the United Nations system in order to ensure a stronger and more effective Organization. On that note, my delegation endorses the view of other delegations on the need to review the membership of the Security Council so that it will better reflect geographical distribution and the underrepresented groups of Member countries of the United Nations, without affecting the authority of the Council.

I hope all the rhetoric that has come before the Assembly can be translated into concrete and practical action. We must be resolute in our collective desire to work together as sovereign nations in addressing the world's problems through multilateral institutions. The blueprint for international cooperation has been established, but reforming certain structures in the United Nations system must be seen as a prerequisite if we are serious about moving forward. The Achilles heel of the current structure is the imbalance of power in the United Nations system. It has become so chronic that it has weakened the multilateral focus, cohesiveness and internationalism of the United Nations.

The principles of democratization and good governance so actively advocated and championed by some Members must be reflected in the reorganization and decision-making process of the United Nations system.

It is in this regard that Vanuatu supports the review of the permanent membership of the Security Council in order to include Japan and one representative each from the African continent, the Middle East and the group of small developing countries. A more representative Council will bring about openness and transparency, create confidence and ameliorate understanding and cooperation. A restructuring of the membership of the Security Council is long overdue. Diversity is essential there.

My Government looks forward to the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Threats.

Although the fight against terrorism takes centre stage, it must not overshadow the socio-economic development agenda and other serious security concerns affecting the developing world, and in particular small island States. Resources will inevitably be diverted towards combating terrorism in all its facets, but judicious decisions need to be taken. It is against that background that our delegation wishes to associate itself with statements made by other delegations on the imperativeness of supporting the development constraints of developing nations, and in particular the concerns of the small island States on vulnerability.

At the Millennium Summit leaders adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals, with targets to be achieved by 2015. Although commitments have been made, the lethargic performance of many countries, including Vanuatu, demonstrate the need for more international support in assisting countries to meet those targets.

The global economic situation today discriminates against many developing economies. Unfair trading practices and the imposition of intrusive policies on national economies — including that of Vanuatu — affect those economies by opening them up to unfavourable conditions that only favour stronger nations. The post-Cancún period poses extreme challenges to the economic survival and socio-economic stability of many small developing nations like Vanuatu.

My Government's initial focus is on the social sector, namely, on health and education. The Government's prioritized action agenda, which was launched last year in consultation with our development partners, is the catalyst for Vanuatu's medium- to long-term strategic planning. This development policy framework is consistent with achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and emphasizes the need to empower our rural population through infrastructure- and capacity-building initiatives. We appeal to our development partners to adequately assist us in its implementation.

On that note, my delegation wishes to express its gratitude to the United States of America for granting Vanuatu eligibility to access development funding from the Millennium Challenge Account.

The primary responsibility for development lies with a State itself. Yet, external influences and conditional aid have not adequately corresponded with Vanuatu's development priorities and achievements. The pretext for meting out foreign advice conditioned with development assistance has been to improve governance and other sectors considered vital in establishing a strong economy. In Vanuatu's case that line of argument has not produced tangible results, with restricted progress being reflected in our continuous struggle with reforms that are more or less dictated by external forces.

Both the recipient and the external assistance must be balanced and sensitive to national interests. Too often, that normal reaction is misunderstood by some of our development partners. From Vanuatu's perspective, externally driven reforms must be buttressed by an equal partnership that respects local tradition, culture and the rights of all citizens without disturbing the essential uniting mechanisms of society that have successfully held us together over time. An exploitative agenda can only erode and dismantle those ingrained mechanisms, leaving us vulnerable to the rapid changes affecting all of us today. Vanuatu embraces democracy and the concepts of governance and transparency, but they must be tailored to suit the traditional system without affecting the relevance and significance of those far-reaching principles.

In recent times, the history of the Organization has been characterized by indecision, which blemishes the record of the United Nations. I speak about the longstanding issue of self-determination, and in particular the case of West Papua, and I do so while being cognizant of the Charter and while espousing the principles that continue to guide the Organization's efforts in the process of self-determination. The United Nations must be consistent in its decisions for the recognition and respect of the fundamental rights to self-determination for the people of West Papua. The truth surrounding the so-called Act of Free Choice must be exposed to the Melanesian sisters and brothers of West Papua and the rest of the international community. Saddest of all is General Assembly resolution 2504 (XXIV) of 1969, concerning West Papua. How can the United Nations continue to ignore the cries of over 3 million people demanding justice? As world leaders, we have time and again expressed serious concerns and dissatisfaction about the fact that certain decisions and actions by the United Nations or its bodies were not consistent with the purposes and intentions of the Charter. However, in the case of West Papua, absolutely nothing has been done to rectify the gross violation of internationally accepted practice. It is therefore our joint responsibility to address this grey area of history.

The continuing disputes and concerns raised with regard to the legality of United Nations-endorsed instruments that have been concluded throughout the years — such as the New York Agreement of 1962, to govern the United Nations administration of the so-called Act of Free Choice in West Papua — is a clear example challenging the integrity and validity of United Nations resolutions at that time. In our opinion, the United Nations-conducted exercises were a total farce conditioned only to suit the geopolitical climate of that period. The United Nations cannot, and must not, continue to turn a blind eye to its own past failures. It is morally, politically and legally wrong to do so. The Netherlands in particular, which was the former colonial authority, should also recognize that it should shoulder some responsibility in helping to resolve the unfortunate situation of West Papua in a peaceful and transparent manner. Why is no one accountable for those unjust decisions affecting the lives of millions of people today?

Vanuatu therefore calls for the establishment of a special commission of inquiry to review the United Nations conduct in relation to the 1969 Act. We also call for the United Nations to send a fact-finding mission to examine the situation in West Papua with regard to human rights abuses and other related issues. And we call for the reinscription of West Papua on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Those are critically challenging responsibilities.

On a final matter, my delegation strongly reaffirms its support for resolution 2758 (XXVI), which was adopted during the twenty-sixth session, in 1971, and which recognized the legal and political representation of the People's Republic of China as a Member of the United Nations. Vanuatu again reiterates its unwavering support for one China and urges all members of the United Nations to work in the interests of world peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

In conclusion, I must bring to the attention of the Assembly another priority issue that is of grave importance to my Government and nation. I would once again like to raise the matter of the relocation of the Pacific Operations Centre of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) from Vanuatu to another location. My Government was not properly consulted in that regard, and requests that the decision to relocate the Centre from Vanuatu be reconsidered. If the Centre's relevance in the region is being questioned, then my Government would propose that a proper review be carried out with a view to restructuring the ESCAP office in order to relocate the Pacific Operations Centre to Bangkok. Programmes and activities under ESCAP responsibility may be better coordinated through the United Nations Development Programme activities in the region.

I hope that wisdom will prevail as the debate continues on our future destiny. Despite all our differences and diversity, human security for all is our main goal. That should remain the focus of the United Nations agenda. The cardinal question is whether Members will allow the United Nations to undertake serious reforms in meeting the challenges ahead. The future remains in our hands.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. François-Xavier Ngoubeyou, Minister of State in Charge of External Relations of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Ngoubeyou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): On 10 June 2004, you, Mr. President, were elected to serve as President of the General Assembly. As you begin your term of office, I have the great pleasure of conveying to you the warm and fraternal congratulations of the people of Cameroon — brother, neighbour and friend of your country, Gabon — as well as from Cameroon's Government and its President, Mr. Paul Biya. Your election crowns an outstanding career and is a tribute to Gabon's diplomacy under the wise guidance of President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba.

Cameroon would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. We would like to reiterate our full cooperation to you, Mr. President, and to say that we are at your disposal. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for the important work he accomplished with the tireless support of the Bureau, including in particular with regard to our common endeavour to reform the Organization and enhance its effectiveness by, among other things, reviewing the General Assembly's methods of work.

The waning year has strengthened our common resolve to strengthen multilateralism and to give it prominence in the management of international affairs in the new international order, with the United Nations as the foundation and framework of that order. Despite the ups and downs that the United Nations has experienced, in particular in the Security Council, it is time for there to be an active dialogue among the world's nations, all of which adhere to the universality of the Organization and its unique and irreplaceable role in promoting economic and social development and international peace and security. The world of course faces numerous challenges, some of which are new in nature. Others, however, although older and better known, remain without real solutions — either due to their complexity or because of a lack of determination on the part of the international community to mobilize ways and means commensurate with the stakes.

In January 2005, the General Assembly will receive a report from the Panel of eminent persons appointed by the Secretary-General to reflect on reforms that could make the Organization more effective, transparent and democratic, as well as better able to carry out its mission and tackle the new challenges requiring our attention. I trust that the Panel will not fail to rely upon previous relevant proposals when framing its recommendations, in particular those made at the Millennium Summit. As far as Cameroon is concerned, mankind must be at the heart of any substantive reform of the United Nations.

My country continues to promote the proposal put forth here in New York during the Millennium Summit by President Paul Biya. That proposal called for the creation within the Secretariat of an international ethics-monitoring centre entrusted with the task of "promoting fundamental and universal human values between and within nations". (*A/55/PV.5, p. 27*)

In addition, it also seems that the time has come for the General Assembly to express its views on the issue of Security Council reform, and in particular with regard to expanding its membership. The proposals that have been introduced in the General Assembly are undoubtedly a very good basis for discussion. The Assembly will recall that the Organization of African Unity called for a reconstituted Security Council that included seven seats for Africa, including 2 permanent seats. That proposal, which Cameroon fully endorses, still stands. Nevertheless, we must forge concrete consensus without delay, as an indicator of greater transparency and renewed legitimacy of a Security Council that is more effective and credible.

Standing side-by-side with other nations, Cameroon is resolutely committed to eradicating new threats that seriously imperil international peace and security. We unreservedly condemn international terrorism and all forms of fundamentalism and extremism, which provide it with both a breeding ground and a vehicle. It is for that reason that we reiterate our solidarity with all those who have fallen victim to terrorism, most recently in Russia and the Middle East.

The efforts undertaken by the Security Council in that regard are encouraging. However, we believe that the time has come for worldwide globalization and the summit level. It is time to act together against the terrorist hydra. Cameroon once again suggests that a high-level conference be urgently convened to define collectively more effective strategies to combat terrorism.

The new threats confronting the world are real challenges, and it is only right that they be given certain priority. That approach will be quite appropriate as the Organization's other traditional concerns continue to enjoy our full attention. Cameroon believes that nothing can justify terrorism. Nevertheless, the response to terrorism and to other new threats cannot be solely a military response.

The modern world must focus on the causes of violence and on the injustices that undermine international peace. Resolving regional conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere; combating poverty and mobilizing against great epidemics, and against HIV/AIDS in particular; redressing the imbalance in world trade in goods and services; and addressing the foreign debt of poor countries — like the new threats, all these challenges require the Organization's attention.

I mention this parallel because we run a real risk, today, of getting used to the endemic poverty that kills thousands every day, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Solidarity with the poor must become a very concrete reality rather than mere lip service. In order to combat hunger and poverty, we need massive private and public financing. We need relief from the burden of debt.

The world today is faced with a paradox. The poorest countries are the ones that have the most open and liberal economies. Even their non-commercial sector has been privatized, causing unemployment for millions of citizens and the destabilization of basic social sectors, such as water and electricity, for many years, with harmful consequences for all economic activity. The current economic order, if we are not careful, could consolidate — and indeed make permanent — current relations based on force, to the benefit of rich countries and to the detriment of poor countries. The rich can easily subsidize their agriculture, their industry and their airlines, among other sectors. The poor countries, however, under the watchful eyes of financial institutions in which their voices go unheard, must submit themselves to the law of the market. Cotton from West and Central Africa is a perfect example of unbalanced and unfair globalization. We should not become discouraged, however, and Cameroon is convinced that under your presidency, Sir, the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly will adopt strong initiatives to help poor countries and to ensure a readjustment of globalization, making it more equitable and beneficial to all. International economic relations must be profoundly reformed with a view to ensuring greater United Nations involvement.

The same issues that apply to the economy also apply to the subject of health. The world, viewed in its entirety, is rich. It has the means of providing adequate health for all. Medicines exist that should make it possible to contain the major pandemics. Research scientists and the pharmaceutical industry are making great strides on a daily basis in combating malaria, tuberculosis, meningitis and cholera, among other diseases. Those scourges, however, kill millions of Africans every year. The reason for this is poverty and insufficient means to obtain care and medicines.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, which is far more terrible since it is thus far incurable, we welcome the fact that scientific research today is making it possible to drastically diminish its devastating scope. The Bangkok International AIDS Conference has certainly given reason for hope. Significant pledges to help eradicate this scourge are announced on a daily basis. Unfortunately, most of the persons infected by the HIV virus are unable to obtain anti-retroviral medications since they lack the necessary financial means. Combating AIDS is a worldwide cause, rallying us all.

I have touched upon regional conflicts. Their negative impact on the international environment, whether politically, economically or in humanitarian and security terms, requires no further demonstration. Africa, as if not already handicapped enough, is the continent most plagued by conflict, as evidenced by the Security Council agenda.

The situation in some countries gives rise to relative optimism. Developments in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and the Comoros give us reasons for hope. Recent firm commitments by political actors in the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire doubtless give rise to better prospects for that fraternal, friendly country.

In Central Africa, despite some improvement, the situation remains worrisome. It calls for constant vigilance and increased involvement on all levels by the international community. In this respect, the international conference on the Great Lakes region, which has been announced several times but has always been deferred, must finally be held as scheduled in November 2004. That will make it possible to lay a fresh foundation for constructive cooperation among the countries of the region, consistent with the interests of their respective peoples.

Still with regard to Central Africa, it is our hope that, at this session, the debate on cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) will address the concerns expressed by our subregion's heads of State to the Secretary-General's multidisciplinary assessment mission to Central Africa. I recall here that the heads of State had unanimously and firmly expressed a desire for a political presence by the Secretary-General in Central Africa through a permanent subregional structure. We take note of the statement made here in this connection by the delegation of the Republic of the Congo, as Chairman of ECCAS.

The crisis in Darfur is currently a matter of grave concern on our continent. Wishing to prevent a catastrophe such as has occurred in the past, the African Union has squarely embraced this question with the decisive support of the Security Council and other international partners. We all hope a positive solution will be reached quickly. In order to do this, dialogue must be ongoing, forward-looking and voluntary on the part of all protagonists in the crisis. To be sure, the political will and determination of the Sudanese authorities are key; they must continue to display these qualities. That is the only way that an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe will be avoided. In any case, the international community must be further mobilized behind the African Union in order to ward off this curse and avert this major crisis without delay.

My country is profoundly devoted to peace. It will spare no effort to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. In that connection, it will continue to promote peace throughout the world, and specifically in Africa, in Central Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea.

As members know, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, after lengthy deliberations lasting almost 10 years, handed down its judgment, on 10 October 2002, relating to the boundary dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria. Both countries, within the context of the Joint Commission established by the Secretary-General and chaired by his Special Representative, have agreed to define the ways and means of implementing that judgment and have adopted a programme of work with a specific timetable, approved on 31 January 2004 by their heads of State and the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General has eloquently reported on the progress that has been made in this connection. We call upon the United Nations family to give its full support to the Secretary-General and to use its influence to help Nigeria and Cameroon in implementing the judgment of the International Court of Justice.

Whether it be the reform of our Organization to make it more efficient, democratic and legitimate; or the Middle East peace process to re-launch the road map; or pacification, reconstruction, enhanced security and institution-building in Iraq and Afghanistan; or the settlement of African disputes and the post-conflict reconstruction of such countries; or combating AIDS and other pandemics; or adjusting financial and trade mechanisms to help the weakest and most exposed countries; or, finally, eliminating poverty: Mr. President, our dear brother, we think that you have a full plate. Quite fortunately, your great qualities will allow you to involve the international community in working on these problems.

Moreover, you have at your side the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, whose actions and commitments to promote peace, security and development today serve as both a lever and an engine for the activities undertaken by the international community as a whole. You also have at your side, I am sure, the entirety of the United Nations membership. Cameroon, for its part, will spare no effort to support you in your lofty mission.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Tom Butime, acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda.

Mr. Butime (Uganda): On behalf of my delegation, the people of Uganda, and on my own behalf, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Jean Ping, from the sister African Republic of Gabon, upon your election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I have every confidence in your stewardship in steering the session to a successful conclusion.

I thank the Secretary-General for his excellent leadership, especially during these trying times for the United Nations. I note with satisfaction that, after a year in which the centrality of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security has come under serious challenge, there seems to be a return to the more widely accepted multilateral approach to resolving global challenges.

Terrorism continues to be one of the biggest threats to international peace and security. Since 11 September 2001, thousands of innocent people, including women and children, have been killed or maimed as a result of indiscriminate terrorist acts. This year, the world has witnessed many innocent civilians massacred in cold blood, hostages beheaded in the most barbaric manner, children mutilated by suicide bombers and terrorist groups, very often in the name of extremist and misguided causes and ideologies. Whether it is the recent appalling attack on school children in the Russian town of Beslan, or the massacre of civilians in Balonyo in northern Uganda, the intention of terrorists is the same: to undermine and divide our societies, overthrow elected Governments, and to strike at the heart of international peace and stability.

The Uganda delegation condemns those terrorist acts in the strongest terms. We do not accept that any cause, however genuine, warrants the indiscriminate destruction of human life or property.

In Uganda, we have been fighting against a terrorist organization known as the Lord's Resistance Army, based in southern Sudan. That organization has killed, maimed and abducted tens of thousands of Ugandan children in the northern part of Uganda. The acts of plunder and destruction by those criminals have laid to waste entire villages and driven helpless villagers into camps for internally displaced persons. The Government of Uganda is sparing no effort, with the cooperation of the Government of Sudan, to end that situation and restore peace and stability in this area. We are confident that soon the remnants of those terrorists will have been eliminated or captured. Despite amnesty legislation and a standing offer of pardon by our President, very few have responded. However, recently some improvement in reporting has been observed.

Uganda welcomes the recent restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people. We call upon the United Nations, in particular, and the international community as a whole, to do everything possible to assist the interim Government in the rehabilitation of Iraq and re-establishment of the physical and political infrastructure to allow the holding of scheduled elections in that country.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine, often driven by rigid positions, continues to pose a serious threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. Uganda supports the Quartet-led road map for a comprehensive peaceful settlement in the Middle East. We support the establishment of a Palestinian State existing side-by-side and in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

After more than 50 years of violence and bloodshed, both the Israelis and Palestinians must rethink their positions. New, creative approaches to a comprehensive peace should therefore be sought for the sake of their peoples. Every year we adopt resolutions which remain mere paper. Resolutions are not solutions in themselves; it is high time we engaged constructively in the serious search for a solution, for the future of humanity and the Middle East.

Turning to the Great Lakes region, we note with satisfaction the positive developments with regard to the peace processes in various conflict situations. In

Burundi, the transitional Government has been consolidated with almost all the fighting groups subscribing to the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi. We call upon the groups still remaining outside the peace settlement to cease their military operations and join the peace process. We congratulate the African peace mission for its contribution to the peace process and we welcome the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers to Burundi. Election dates may change, but the elections must be held sooner or later. Elections, a new Government and good proposals relating to the question of representation — all must work for peace for Burundi. It is therefore important that the international community extend the necessary assistance for the consolidation of peace, stability, rehabilitation and development of Burundi.

Uganda remains committed to supporting the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We urge all parties in the Government of National Unity in Kinshasa to remain committed to the Pretoria Peace Agreement and to resist any temptation to resume hostilities. We also call upon the Security Council to strengthen the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) under Chapter VII of the Charter to consolidate its peacekeeping operations. A robust MONUC force would be critical for the enforcement of Security Council resolution 1493 (2003) on the arms embargo against militias, as well as the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration of all armed rebel groups and militias operating on the territory of the DRC. That would also serve to reduce, and hopefully to eliminate, inter-ethnic clashes in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and help to reassure neighbouring countries about cross-border security. It may also be important to include other legitimate groups in the Government of National Unity and Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to enhance peace. We believe that before democratic elections are held it is important to create a consensus for peace and security.

Uganda believes that as a result of the positive achievements in the peace processes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo there is an urgent need to convene the international conference on the Great Lakes region under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union. The conference, which is scheduled to take place in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, in November 2004, will bring together a core group of the Great Lakes countries and the neighbouring countries affected by the conflicts or those that, by infection, contribute to them.

In order to consolidate the peace efforts, we hope that the Great Lakes regional conference will involve all stakeholders in the development of a strategic plan of action on the key issues, including regional peace and security, development, post-conflict reconstruction and regional integration in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). I am glad to note that countries of the Great Lakes region, including Uganda, have already embarked on a preparatory process for the conference involving youth and women's groups, non-governmental organizations and local government officials from all border districts. We believe that this inclusive process will ensure national ownership and commitment to the implementation of the recommendations of the conference.

The delegation of Uganda welcomes the peace accords recently signed in Nairobi between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Liberation Army (SPLM/A). We hope that those accords will lead to the end of the long-running conflict, which has caused untold suffering to the people of the southern Sudan and led to insecurity in neighbouring countries — particularly my own, Uganda. With the return of peace and stability in the southern Sudan, we are confident that we will be able to bring to an end the Lord's Resistance Army attacks against our people in the northern part of Uganda.

My country is an active participant in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development initiative that has brought the various factions in Somalia together to the negotiating table to end the conflict in that country. We note with great satisfaction the progress that has so far been made, and we salute the people of Somalia for coming together to establish a Parliament embracing all groups.

In 2005 the United Nations will observe the fifth anniversary of the Millennium Summit, where we pledged our political will and commitment to a number of Millennium Development Goals, including the reduction of poverty by 50 per cent by 2015. It is, therefore, of great concern that in many parts of Africa poverty levels are rising as per capita incomes continue to decline and that infant and maternal mortality rates are on the increase, while official development assistance commitments remain unfulfilled.

In order to make progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring the equitable sharing of the benefits of globalization, the General Assembly should focus on the following, inter alia: effective follow-up to and implementation of the various plans of action, declarations and strategies relating to the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation on sustainable development, the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and the Almaty Programme of Action on landlocked developing countries; restructuring of the global trading system, especially in agriculture, mode 4 trade in services and increasing value-added export products from the developing countries; mobilization of adequate resources to fight malaria, tuberculosis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, covering prevention, care and research and development to ensure the provision of cheaper and more effective drugs and possibly the discovery of an HIV/AIDS vaccine; strengthening of South-South cooperation, including measures by the more advanced developing countries to open their markets to products from the least developed countries; and stronger international support for NEPAD, which reflects Africa's priorities to address development, governance and the security challenges facing the continent. Critical support areas will include market access, measures to encourage increased foreign direct investment in African countries, higher levels of official development assistance for infrastructure and human resources development, ensuring sustainable debt levels, regional integration, enhancement of the African Union's capacity to deal with conflict situations and implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

As the United Nations approaches its sixtieth birthday in 2005, the need for revitalization of the General Assembly and restructuring of the Security Council has never been greater. The need for reform of the United Nations is imperative if we want to enhance the role of the Organization and the effectiveness of multilateralism to address emerging hard threats such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and genocide, as well as other challenges, such as persistent poverty and HIV/AIDS. It is therefore fitting that the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change will be discussed in 2005.

With regard to reform of the Security Council, the restructuring should reflect the need for democratization and ensuring a balanced and equitable geographical representation. We believe that Africa should be allocated no less than two permanent and five non-permanent seats in the expanded Security Council.

In summary, Uganda is calling for stronger collective action against international terrorism and support for the post-conflict rehabilitation and development programme in northern Uganda. We have noted the positive developments in the Great Lakes region and stressed the importance of convening the international conference on the Great Lakes region in Dar es Salaam in November 2004. We have highlighted the significance of 2005 — as the both the sixtieth birthday of the United Nations and the fifth anniversary of the Millennium Summit — as a key time to focus on meeting the Millennium Development Goals and the revitalization and restructuring of the United Nations to enhance the role of the Organization and to ensure the effectiveness of collective multilateral action.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

A number of representatives have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind Members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): At the 13th meeting the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia has accused the Government of Eritrea of endangering the peace process because it refused to enter into a dialogue with his Government to discuss the revision of the final and binding decision of the Eritrea/Ethiopia Boundary Commission. That is no surprise to Eritreans, who have, by now, become accustomed to such Orwellian subterfuge and doublespeak. The Foreign Minister of Ethiopia is pinning hope on the international community's not being fully aware of the full extent of the contents of the Algiers Agreements, the mandate and decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) and the numerous resolutions of the Security Council.

The peace process has, in fact, been endangered by his Government's rejection of the final and binding decision of the EEBC and its refusal to pay heed to the Security Council's repeated calls for his country's compliance with the decision and for its cooperation with the Commission so as to expeditiously finalize the demarcation process, which is the cornerstone of the Algiers Agreements.

I would like to refer to some of the issues raised by the Foreign Minister and clarify them for the record and in the interests of truth — a truth that the rest of the world recognizes.

First, the Foreign Minister declared that

> "it has become difficult for Ethiopia and Eritrea to formally complete the peace process because of complications that have been created in connection with the implementation of some aspects of the decision of the Eritrea/Ethiopia Boundary Commission".

It should be clear to all that the sole complication in the peace process arises from Ethiopia's rejection of the final and binding decision of the Commission and its refusal to cooperate with the EEBC in the expeditious demarcation of the border, in spite of numerous Security Council resolutions and declarations by the European Union and others.

In paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1560 (2004), dated 14 September 2004, the Council

> "Urges Ethiopia to show the political will to reaffirm unequivocally its acceptance of the Boundary Commission's decision, and take the necessary steps to enable the Commission to demarcate the border without further delay".

In a declaration made on 17 September 2004, the European Union

> "urges Ethiopia to abide by the Boundary Commission's decision, as agreed in the Algiers Peace Agreement and to fully cooperate with the Boundary Commission in the implementation of the decision."

I also remind His Excellency the Foreign Minister that, in April 2002, he himself declared that

> "According to the Algiers peace deal, both parties should accept the decision of the Boundary Commission as final and binding with no right to appeal".

In this connection, the Eritrean delegation emphasizes that there is no other alternative to the implementation, in good faith, of the final and binding decision of the Commission, because any such attempt would violate the provisions of the Algiers Agreements and international law.

Secondly, the Foreign Minister has declared that the decisions of the EEBC were only "observations". This, again, is at variance with article 4 (2) of the Algiers Agreement of 12 December 2000, which empowers the Commission to delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty borders and to make decisions — not observations. He claims that the implementation of some aspects of the "observations" of the Boundary Commission on demarcation are not in the interests of peace between the two countries and will not advance the major objective of the Algiers Agreements.

The Eritrean delegation submits that peace — just peace — is guaranteed only when it is based on the rule of law, the sanctity of court decisions and respect for the Charter. Any other arrangements based on the law of the jungle would be a root cause of conflict, insecurity and instability. Ethiopia's insistence on an "open-ended dialogue" on the boundary demarcation is certain to lead to conflict. The Foreign Minister is in fact reiterating the position of his Prime Minister, who, on 19 September 2003, declared that the Algiers Agreements should be replaced by an alternative mechanism.

Thirdly, at the 13th meeting the Foreign Minister claims that

> "Nowhere in the whole text of the Agreement of December 2000 is provision made for any entity … to enforce a court decision".

According to preambular paragraph 3 of that Agreement, the parties recommit "themselves to the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, signed in Algiers on 18 June 2000". Article 1 (2) of the same Agreement states that "The parties shall respect and fully implement the provisions of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities".

Paragraph 14 of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities states that the

> "OAU and the United Nations commit themselves to guarantee the respect for this commitment of the two parties until the determination of the common border",

and stipulates that the guarantee shall comprise

> "Measures to be taken by the international community should one or both of the parties violate this commitment, including appropriate measures to be taken under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter by the United Nations Security Council".

Nothing could be clearer than that. Yet, incredible as it may seem, the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia this morning accused Eritrea of "misleading the international community". Who is doing what? The Foreign Minster seems to be confident enough to declare sanctions "unlikely to happen" because of assurances he may have received from certain quarters.

Fourthly, he stated that "Achieving peace and implementing the demarcation of the common boundary between the two countries is primarily the responsibility of Ethiopia and Eritrea". We agree. Yet this is a far cry from being solely the responsibility of the two countries. The United Nations and the African Union are guarantors of the Algiers Agreements, which, incidentally, are referred to in the Security Council's most recent resolution on the subject — resolution 1531 (2004) — as including the 12 December 2000 Agreement and the 18 June 2000 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (S/2000/1183 and S/2000/601).

As guarantors, they become parties to the treaty, and as parties to the treaty they have obligations to ensure the implementation of the agreements and compliance by the parties by, inter alia, applying sanctions under Chapter VII.

During the past 12 months, Ethiopia has been systematic in its subversion of international law and the accepted norms of international behaviour. The people and the Government of Eritrea would like to inform the Assembly that Ethiopia's unrestrained assault on the rule of law, including international law, and the sanctity of treaty agreements will not be limited in their ill effects to the well-being of the States and the peoples of our two countries and our region only. Lawlessness is a highly contagious virus, and it spreads far and wide at great speed. Nor do its destructive consequences recognize boundaries.

Ethiopia's attitude of intransigence and bellicosity is encouraged and sustained by the reluctance of the international community to enforce international law. The United Nations and the African Union, in particular, as well as the European Union and the Government of the United States, which are, respectively, guarantors and witnesses of the Algiers Agreements, must shoulder additional political and moral responsibility. The Algiers Agreements are clear in their provisions, which prescribe sanctions against the party that reneges on its commitment. In fact, Ethiopia had made repeated references to that provision —

The President (*spoke in French*): I am sorry to have to interrupt the representative of Eritrea, but the 10-minute limit has now been exceeded. I would ask him to conclude his statement.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): The light was green; I was going by the green light.

In any case, I have reached the concluding part of my statement. Eritrea's commitment to peace is clear and unqualified. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Eritrean Government has done what it could to resolve all contentious issues by peaceful means — including the issue of the location of the village of Badme, which was the casus belli — through dialogue or through a legal mechanism. The Government of Ethiopia refuses to even consider any such initiative. Eritreans are still committed to peace, peace with justice, peace based on the rule of law and the decision of the arbitration commission. They have never threatened and are not now threatening or sabre-rattling with a view to blackmailing the international community to assume policies of appeasement. They have at all times kept their word and honoured their undertakings. They shall continue to do so.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Komar (Indonesia): My delegation begs your indulgence to take the floor to exercise its right of reply, particularly with reference to the earlier statement by the delegation of Vanuatu.

In its earlier intervention, the delegation of Vanuatu once again and incorrectly raised the status of West Papua, which is unquestionably an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia. The legal status of the province of West Papua was resolved and recognized by the international community decades ago. It is, indeed, our common obligation to consistently uphold the General Assembly's decision rather than question the unquestionable. Therefore, my delegation strongly rejects the reference made by the delegation of Vanuatu.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.

United Nations A/59/PV.15

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

15th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 29 September 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ping .... (Gabon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will hear an address by the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Uribe Vélez (*spoke in Spanish*): I am addressing the General Assembly once again, at a time when the people and the institutions of Colombia are making great progress in their struggle to achieve democratic security. Such security would enable all citizens to live in peace, express their political views without putting their lives in danger and to support or oppose the Government while fully respecting different opinions.

That policy has made significant progress in reducing murders, kidnappings and other terrorist acts, as well as population displacement and the growing of illicit drug crops. There is still a great deal to be done, but if we are persistent we will prevail.

Democratic security is one of Colombia's highest priorities if we are to regain credibility and if our citizens are once again to have confidence in our institutions. When trust is destroyed, the ties between the citizen and the nation are broken. Such trust requires transparency in public and private actions, as well as economic revitalization and social cohesion.

Social cohesion builds trust among citizens and between citizens and the State. Social cohesion is the enemy of poverty and helps to promote equal opportunities. Colombia has established a legal framework to ensure that the benefits of economic growth lead to poverty eradication. Yet Colombia's growth, which during the 1960s and 1970s was averaging 4.5 per cent a year, fell to an average of 2 per cent after 1980. That decline encouraged the informal economy, and was accompanied by poverty. The contrast became increasingly obvious between the formal private sector — which was fair with its workers and complied with its tax payments, but which grew at a slow pace — and the informal sector, which, with its overwhelming influence, drew in the destitute masses.

Drug trafficking, which bankrolls terrorism, reversed the trend towards land distribution, through agrarian reform and the natural process of inheritance from one generation to the next.

Between 1994 and 2000, unemployment among heads of household grew from 4 per cent to 10 per cent, and overall unemployment grew from 7.5 per cent to 19 per cent. In relatively few years, the deficit

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increased from 1.5 per cent to 4.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), public debt rose from 24 per cent to 54 per cent of GDP and 40 per cent of the public budget was allocated to debt servicing and repayment. Very low levels of private investment only made the situation worse.

Defeating poverty requires strong and sustained economic growth. This in turn requires physical and legal security, transparent regulations and macroeconomic stability. Last year, Colombia forecast growth of 2.5 per cent — but growth was close to 4 per cent. This year we are endeavouring to achieve 5 per cent growth. We are able to do because we are restoring confidence among investors. With such growth, unemployment has fallen three points, although it is still quite high. A positive sign is that jobs are being created in sectors that will provide for social security and fair wages for workers. All that has happened despite fiscal restrictions to public investment and in the midst of an intense struggle to eliminate illicit drugs, which have become so significant that they now affect whether there will be positive or negative growth in our agricultural sector.

At one time, my generation explained violence as the result of social inequities. My country's experience over many decades allows me to affirm that terrorist violence has increased poverty and has destroyed the possibility of eliminating social inequity. Violence has worsened poverty and has exploited it to perpetuate itself.

Our goal is to reduce poverty at a rate equal to or higher than economic growth. To a great extent, our social investment programme depends on sound and sustained economic growth. Therefore, our social investment programme goes hand in hand with our democratic security policy. If we neglect security measures that respect democratic values, terrorism will grow, we will lose momentum in defeating it, investment will be affected, the strength of our economic recovery will weaken and we could be left without resources for social investment.

Today's equality lies in economic and social opportunity. That is why we have placed so much emphasis on education. We have increased elementary school enrolment by 750,000, but the country still needs classroom space for 1.25 million new pupils. In 25 months we have increased technical training by two and a half times, promoting basic employment skills to enable young people to join the work force while continuing their studies. In the cities and in the countryside, we have been carrying out a silent revolution in technical training that will reach 4 million young people a year by 2006.

A subsidy is being paid to 340,000 poor families to improve their children's nutrition and ensure school attendance. There are now 503,000 children in the new breakfast programme for children under five; that number will double in 2005. That, together with the school cafeterias and the "Community Mothers" programme, will reach more than 6 million children under various nutrition programmes.

By December, when this Administration will have been in office for 28 months, more than 4 million poor Colombians will have enrolled in the subsidized health programme, in addition to the 13 million who were already protected. We are carrying out legal and administrative reforms to increase coverage, with improved transparency and an effective and efficient use of resources.

Colombia has more than 600,000 senior adults living in extreme poverty. In the past, 60,000 of them received a cash subsidy. This year, we have raised the number to 172,000 of our elderly compatriots. We are now starting a new programme to deliver one meal a day to 400,000 more who do not receive the cash subsidy. In addition, this year we are paying more than $100 million in subsidies to provide electricity to low-income members of the population.

We are also subsidizing more than 7,000 reintegrated former members of various violent groups. This is part of a huge, silent, but effective peace process. When one of those persons is reintegrated, he sees the support of the State and the community, reconciles himself with civic institutions, embraces democracy and coexistence and rejects any justification for violence. We hope that many more thousands will follow, but we will require international cooperation for this programme.

We are subsidizing 21,000 forest ranger families, who were formerly involved in illicit drug crops and are now committed to eliminating them and to recovering their tropical forests. Their task is essential for mankind, considering Colombia's rich biodiversity and its 578,000 square kilometres of jungle, which are threatened by illicit drugs. To guarantee their food security, we are also subsidizing 700,000 farmers, and that number will soon reach 1 million; we are also subsidizing the crops of farmers' associations until they become productive and competitive. Poverty indicators should take account of such subsidies, which are usually not included when measuring the income of those families.

Colombia has suffered a tragedy in the form of internal displacement. We have reduced its incidence by 40 per cent, but it is still high. We have facilitated the return of more 70,000 people and we expect that number to increase. One State agency alone has multiplied eightfold its budget to care for displaced persons.

As a result of a law approved at the beginning of this Government's tenure, the process for "ownership extinction" for illegally acquired assets has moved more quickly. We expect that that mechanism will be used to advance constructive agrarian reform.

By paying additional taxes, the Colombian people are making an effort to finance security measures and restore social investment levels, for a total that represents 2 per cent of our gross domestic product. We have received the support of the multilateral banks, but we require greater understanding from the financial markets: longer-term loans and lower interest rates. We are engaged in an intense struggle, and we need better access to the markets of the industrialized countries.

I would like to reaffirm Colombia's commitment to multilateralism. Multilateralism must continuously improve if it is to become more effective and restore the lost consensus for safeguarding international peace. Building that consensus requires each State to feel that it is being heard and that it is being taken into account.

I am grateful for the support of the United Nations agencies in social matters. We are fully prepared to back the efforts of the international community to consolidate democracy and security in the region, especially in Haiti. Colombia will be part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. We will cooperate with police experts in the fight against drug trafficking, as well as with the humanitarian presence.

Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We must all join in an effective international solidarity movement with our Caribbean brothers, who are so seriously affected by the hurricane season.

We need the total commitment of the international community in the struggle against terrorism in Colombia. Terrorism in one country feeds and strengthens terrorist networks throughout the world. The widows and orphans of violence in our country ask why we attach so much importance to terrorism in other parts of the world, and why some attach so little to the terrorism that besets Colombia. I make this appeal from the depths of our profound democratic conviction. It is difficult to find another country facing such a challenge of terrorism while simultaneously strengthening its democracy.

Today, Colombia offer effective guarantees for the exercise of political pluralism by means of our democratic security policy. Our institutions combat terrorism with the unflinching political will of the Government. They do so with courage, selflessness and transparency. A dirty war has no place in our policies.

A democratic State has the right to ask the world to demand that the terrorists return their kidnap victims rather than clamouring for lopsided agreements with terrorists. We ask the world for more decisive and more effective support. If it is broadened, the violent groups will have no option but to abandon terrorism and to accept peace.

With the people of Colombia, its democratic institutions and the international community united, we can make Colombia an example of the capacity to defeat terrorism and observe human rights. And we can make Colombia an example of the ability to defeat terrorism and of the will to build social justice.

We will expel terror with the help of legitimate institutions and of a community of solidarity and justice, with opportunities for its poorest members.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Colombia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Cyril Svoboda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Svoboda (Czech Republic): Let me first congratulate Mr. Jean Ping on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session and wish him every success in this important position. I would also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, for his relentless efforts and leadership throughout the year.

In May, the Czech Republic became a member of the European Union (EU). For the first time, we took part in the preparation of the EU statement presented here last week by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, as well as in shaping the EU priorities for the current General Assembly session. It goes without saying that we fully associate ourselves with those texts.

We share the commitment of the EU to effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core. Indeed, the vision of a strong and truly universal United Nations is one of the fundamentals of Czech foreign policy.

Security, or the lack of it, has emerged as the most challenging problem today. International terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, State failure or organized crime — these are the threats menacing all of us.

Terrorism spares no one anywhere in the world. The brutality of the attacks and the increase in their number over the past year are frightening. It seems that the whole nature of terrorism is changing. While most earlier terrorists tried to target specific persons or institutions, with the aim of gaining the sympathy of the general public, today's terrorists are solely intent on spreading fear and terror. Their target is the general public, each one of us, and the more killed the better. What can we expect of individuals who sacrifice unlimited numbers of their own people to a perverse ideology? Their acquisition of weapons of mass destruction would result in a deadly combination.

Absolute disregard for life by these "new" terrorists has also given rise to their most dangerous tool, the ideological suicide bomber. Previously, terrorists had to devote most of their energy to planning escape routes and concealing themselves; a suicide bomber, on the other hand, needs only to concentrate on how best to hit and to destroy his target.

The diffusion of targets and the perpetrators' absolute resolve mean that terrorist threats have completely permeated our public and private spaces, each area of which has become a defence site. All this could ultimately lead to very disagreeable restrictions on certain freedoms and rights. And this takes us full circle.

If we are lax in understanding our roots and values, and if we do not have a comprehensive grasp of human rights, we could find that, in the end, we are unable to cope with the uneasy balance between security and freedom.

I do not want to speculate about cause and effect. It is not the case that a terrorist attack is a reaction, an inappropriate reaction, to something. Terrorists' ideology is aggressive and expansive, and they do not recognize terms such as "conciliation" or "coexistence". Therefore, each offer we make to negotiate, each sign of unwillingness to defend ourselves, is seen by them as further proof of our weakness and, by extension, of their "right" to assume control of declining society.

In the fight against terrorism, nobody can remain neutral. The United Nations has to pave the way for this fight at the global level. To be sure, the Counter-Terrorism Committee has done an outstanding job in overseeing the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and in facilitating universal acceptance of the United Nations Conventions on terrorism; but certainly more can and should be done. The true tests of our ability to cooperate are Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Iraq continues to be of utmost concern to the international community. The full transfer of power to the Iraqi Interim Government is a historic moment for the country and an essential step on the road towards a free, prosperous and secure country. The road will, no doubt, be long and winding. Without the elimination of terrorist activities and the stabilization of the security situation, political transition and economic recovery will remain elusive.

Last summer, United Nations employees in Iraq paid the highest price for their commitment to help those in need. Now, the Organization has new tasks before it, including those connected with preparations for free elections in January 2005. However, a greater engagement of the United Nations requires a more secure environment and stronger support from the international community. The Czech Republic's contribution is focused mainly on building up Iraqi security forces and helping to finance the protection of the United Nations presence in Iraq.

Iraq, however, must not divert our attention from other major security concerns, including Afghanistan, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. In all these conflicts, my country seeks to play a constructive role, contributing in various ways to the related efforts of the international community. Thus, in Afghanistan, the Czech Republic is participating in the stabilization process and the rooting out of terrorism; in Africa, it is taking part in peacekeeping operations; in Kosovo, we have our largest military contingent abroad serving in the Kosovo Force and we intend to contribute troops to the new EU-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we believe that the role of the international community lies in providing a trusted frame of reference. It is crucial that both parties to the conflict make a sincere effort to implement their obligations in order to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security and in a peaceful and secure neighbourhood.

Last but not least, Africa has to remain on our agenda. Ten years after the genocide in Rwanda, another part of Africa is suffering from grave ethnic violence. In Darfur, people are dying every day, and in the Great Lakes region the situation is not much better. The international community must not turn away from those tragedies.

So far I have focused mainly on what we call hard threats to international security. But I do not want to create an impression that other problems plaguing the contemporary world are of lesser importance. Those more traditional problems, or soft threats, also continue to deserve our undiminished attention. There is no question of these two threats competing for our response; there is no question of forgetting one in favour of the other.

That is why the Czech Republic, as an emerging donor country, supports the strengthening of multilateral development assistance within the United Nations system, as well as close cooperation among the United Nations funds and programmes and the Bretton Woods institutions. That is why we support and strive to contribute to activities undertaken in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development targets.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms remains a priority of Czech foreign policy. Together with the rest of the EU, we place special emphasis on the abolition of the death penalty, the fight against torture — in fact, just a few days ago we signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment — the protection of children in armed conflicts and, of course, respect for the activities of human rights defenders who, unfortunately, continue to face difficult conditions in a number of countries, such as Belarus, Myanmar and Cuba, among others.

Convinced that all people have equal rights and dignity, the Czech Republic is concerned about recent attempts to create a human being through cloning. We therefore concur with those calling for the swift adoption of a legally binding instrument at the universal level regulating the cloning of human beings.

Faced with the aforementioned challenges, the United Nations has to change. Of course, United Nations reform seems to be on everyone's agenda. There are, perhaps, too many reform processes going on in parallel or partially overlapping. To achieve genuine reform, however, we simply have to keep the pressure on; the United Nations must continue constantly to monitor itself and to continue its pursuit of improvement.

The Czech Republic considers itself a reform-minded country. It is an advocate of revitalization of the General Assembly, strengthening of the United Nations and reform and enlargement of the Security Council. For many years, we have been actively involved in those processes, including through the Czech presidency of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. We have no vested interest in these reforms except the better functioning and greater authority of the whole United Nations. The Czech Republic will continue to support inevitable reform measures, including enlargement of the Security Council in both categories of membership. In particular, we support the aspiration of Germany and Japan to permanent seats, as well as the allocation of a further three new permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We greatly appreciate the reform efforts that the Secretary-General has made so far, and we expect his guidance to continue in the years to come. We eagerly await the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which should place United Nations reform in a wider context of major global threats and challenges.

We are determined to play an active role in finding multilateral and United Nations-based solutions to numerous grave problems of the contemporary world. An expression of that commitment and determination is our candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2008-2009.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Samuel R. Insanally, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guyana and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): The General Assembly, this most democratic and representative of United Nations organs, has served for almost six decades now as a forum in which all States, no matter their size or status, may address with equal voice issues of interest and concern to them as well as to the international community. It has indeed become the parliament of humankind.

To the President of the General Assembly, a distinguished son of Africa, now falls the task of guiding the deliberations of this fifty-ninth session. I would like to offer him my delegation's warm congratulations and good wishes as he assumes his high responsibilities.

I would like to extend to the outgoing President, The Honourable Julian Hunte, our appreciation and thanks for his magisterial direction of the Assembly's activities over the past year. His performance is a source of pride and satisfaction, not only to his native Saint Lucia, but also to the wider Caribbean community, to which both our countries belong. Allow me also to convey to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, our gratitude for his sure and steady leadership of the Organization during these tumultuous times.

The speakers who have preceded me in the debate have all expressed their preoccupation at the rising level of threat to global peace and security, as well as to our common economic and social security. Intense conflict in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, Africa and Europe has destroyed thousands of innocent lives and wreaked havoc on the States involved. At the same time, despite the many promises of globalization, development continues to elude the majority of countries, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has not abated, continuously robbing us of precious human and financial resources. Altogether, the international scenario facing us is distressing, offering scant hope for early improvement. Like others, therefore, my delegation cannot help but state its concern at the ever-worsening international climate.

While most of our problems are man-made, many of our States, such as those in the Caribbean, must also face the constant threat of natural disasters. The recent wave of hurricanes that destroyed our sister State of Grenada and severely battered other island countries, such as Haiti, the Bahamas, Cuba, the Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, has shown how destructive the forces of nature can be to our development. The Government of Guyana extends its solidarity and support to all those afflicted, as well as to the United States of America, whose state of Florida has also been seriously struck. Such is the frequency of these phenomena that the international community must now seek to devise stronger and more responsive machinery to address their consequences. In this regard, Guyana attaches high importance to the outcome, next January, of the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, which will be held in Mauritius, and the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe, Japan.

The scourge of terrorism has now reached such a scale that it has been aptly described as a third world war. Scarce resources must now be diverted from development to the war on terror. Yet the rampage of destruction continues unrestrained. The process under way to stem the illicit global trade in small arms and light weapons and to forge more effective international instruments against terrorism and transnational crime commands Guyana's full support. We anxiously await the report of the United Nations High-level Panel on

Threats, Challenges and Change, in the hope that it will offer practical recommendations for preserving global peace and stability. The time may have come, we believe, to fully implement the collective security system that is envisaged in the United Nations Charter.

The age of globalization and liberalization in which we now live has undoubtedly brought with it laissez-faire attitudes and policies that have seriously affected societies everywhere. Lawlessness and violence are the new order of the day, threatening to destroy established systems of governance, especially in weak States, as demonstrated by the recent interruption of the democratic process in Haiti, the newest member of our Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which has exacerbated social conditions in that country. The Inter-American Democratic Charter and, indeed, our own Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community expressly condemn such breaches of democracy. Notwithstanding our concern at these developments, Guyana stands ready to help the fraternal people of Haiti overcome their social distress. CARICOM, of which both Guyana and Haiti are members, is currently coordinating our humanitarian assistance to the island.

Respect for the fundamental tenets of the United Nations is essential if we are to avoid conflicts. The Charter is clear in its proscription of the use of force except under the particular circumstances of Chapter VII. In this context, let me say that Guyana supports the reform of the Security Council through an expansion in the membership of both the permanent and non-permanent categories and a general improvement of its modus operandi. After careful deliberation and in an attempt to break the current logjam in the discussions, my Government has decided at this stage to support the aspirations of Brazil, India and an African State to permanent membership. We believe that their participation as developing States in the work of the Council will make that body more balanced, representative and, ultimately, more accountable to the Assembly for the maintenance of global peace and security.

For Guyana, as for the rest of the international community, the situation in Iraq continues to be a source of preoccupation. We would wish to see peace and stability quickly restored to that country and its people. Similarly, we urge an end to the suicidal conflict between Israel and Palestine and a return to negotiations leading to the creation of an independent Palestine and peaceful co-existence between the two States.

As conflicts and humanitarian crises such as the one in Darfur continue to multiply, the United Nations is being called to do more with less. We therefore call for the strengthening of regional arrangements, such as those of the Organization of American States and the African Union, acting in concert with the United Nations, to assist in the search for durable solutions to conflicts and disputes.

It is also imperative that we strive with greater determination to secure our economic development and social progress. For more than six decades now, the international community has diligently sought answers to the development dilemma, moving from one facet to another, from disarmament to basic needs, from economic growth to full employment, from partnership to national ownership and from good governance to the free market. Thus far, however, the various models of development followed have failed to achieve their goals. In the continuing exploration, this year's Human Development Report has added culture to the list of crucial elements. As a small, multi-ethnic State, Guyana fully accepts this proposition and is committed to preserving the culture that has brought our nation together in service to our national development.

At the same time, we believe that cultural diversity is a contemporary reality and must be recognized by all States. Too often, strategies for peace and development ignore this reality with disastrous results. Not enough consultation and coordination are undertaken to ensure that programmes and projects are in keeping with nationally defined priorities and local circumstances. It is necessary, if failure is to be avoided, for there to be greater dialogue and cooperation in the planning process for development. National leadership remains a sine qua non for successful development and must be strongly supported by our development partners. In this spirit, Guyana renews its support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and other such initiatives based on strong national leadership and full international cooperation.

President Lula of Brazil and the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization are to be commended for calling this Assembly's attention to two major challenges facing the international community today, namely, poverty and the inequities of globalization. Although we daily see on our television screens the emaciated faces of the hungry, we are yet to be stirred with the compassion and generosity of heart needed to relieve their misery. As globalization gains further ground, many more will fall victim to further marginalization, especially in small developing countries that are unable to take advantage of globalization. My own country has recently seen a devastating blow to its sugar industry, on which thousands of our people depend, as a result of trade liberalization and the reform of the European Union's sugar regime. Unless small States like ours are provided with special and differential treatment, they will be excluded from the global economy.

Next year, the world's leaders will meet to review the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All the indications are that there is hardly enough time to achieve our objectives. We can therefore ill afford to stand still. We must determine now what ought to be done to build and sustain momentum to meet the 2015 targets. Guyana's experience has been that these are not likely to be achieved without sustained economic growth. Although we have sound poverty reduction and national development strategies in place, we know that success depends in fair measure on a fair and supportive international environment. We therefore urge that high priority be accorded to greater debt relief, the mobilization of development finance and the creation of equitable trading conditions to enable developing countries such as ours to achieve economic and social progress.

It must be realized, however, that the MDGs, although important and laudable, will not in themselves bring about comprehensive and sustainable development. They are but a subset of the development agenda, which must include, if it is to be successful, political, economic, social and environmental considerations. Without a holistic and well-coordinated approach, lasting solutions to our problems will not be found. It is for that reason that my Government continues to advocate the establishment of a new global human order based on genuine interdependence and partnership between developed and developing countries. We are at a point in time when terror, war, poverty and social chaos threaten to engulf all humanity. We therefore hope that when the relevant item comes before the Assembly next month, it will receive the further support of the international community.

Within recent years the United Nations has faced mounting criticism for its lack of responsiveness to global challenges and for its failure to be democratic in some of its decision-making. While there is often a rush to act on particular issues that are deemed important by some countries, much less attention is paid to the concerns of the vast majority. As a consequence, the credibility and even the legitimacy of the United Nations have been called into question. If that trend continues, the hard-earned prestige of the Organization will be debased and its effectiveness curtailed. There can be no worse danger to humanity than the rejection of multilateralism. We believe experience has now clearly shown that unilateralism cannot resolve the problems of our contemporary world. Only through joint endeavours can we hope to achieve the freedom from fear and the freedom from want to which all our peoples aspire.

As has been so aptly said, the United Nations may not take us to heaven but it can certainly save us from hell. Let us therefore renew our commitment to the high purposes and principles for which it stands.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rogatien Biaou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Biaou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to address my warmest congratulations to Mr. Jean Ping on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. Allow me also to pay a well-deserved tribute to Mr. Ping's eminent predecessor, Mr. Julian Hunte, whose great vitality enabled him to relaunch the discussion on the revitalization of the General Assembly and to give a new impetus towards coordination among the Organization's main bodies. Finally, I would like to express to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the great appreciation of the people and Government of Benin for his work as head of our Organization; we commend him for his courage, his skill and his vision of world affairs.

People from every corner of the planet are placing great hope in our work over the course of this session to give hope and life to their legitimate aspirations. That can only be achieved if we all work together, with conviction and determination, to consolidate our commitment to multilateralism.

Yes, in order to survive, our world, more than ever before, needs multilateral cooperation based on the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Yes, more than ever before the principles of the Charter must be implemented with an acute sense of responsibility and a clear understanding of their purpose, which is to promote international peace and security and economic and social development as essential prerequisites for the promotion and protection of human dignity.

Yes, it is now on the basis of human dignity that we are to measure the validity and accuracy of any national or international policy. We therefore urge every Member of the United Nations to examine their consciences and to make changes accordingly, so that we can give that approach its fullest meaning. It is on this issue that the challenges are the greatest, as can be seen by the blind abuse and violence that is carried out on a massive scale by terrorists and armed groups against innocent civilians.

With respect to armed conflicts and their consequences, we must redouble our past efforts to enhance our ability to act preventively, doing all we can to quickly and effectively defuse potential sources of conflicts and neutralize the seeds of conflict situations before they germinate. As we have no other choice but to cure — since we have been unable to prevent — we have to considerably increase United Nations capabilities in the areas of peacekeeping and management of post-conflict situations.

We would like to reiterate our deep gratitude to the Secretary-General for his personal commitment in seeking a rapid solution to the Ivorian crisis within the framework of the Accra III accords. The international community — despite the erratic evolution of the situation — must stay the course with Côte d'Ivoire in its efforts to respect its commitments and to ensure a smooth transition towards the restoration of peace, by stabilizing the situation so that that country can find its place within the development dynamic in the West African subregion.

We also encourage the international community to focus particular attention on the Great Lakes region, which remains a source of concern. The situation there also requires a regional approach — one that can be best effected by holding the proposed international conference on the Great Lakes region.

We reiterate our firm support for the Secretary-General's recommendations to substantially reinforce the troops of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to help consolidate the peace process in that country.

The situation in Darfur has highlighted the urgent need to realize programmes to establish an independent operations management unit for peacekeeping within the African Union in order to facilitate the rapid deployment of African forces to stem conflicts as soon as they break out.

Conflict prevention can only be effective if we take into consideration the disturbing question of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which is a dangerous destabilizing factor. The illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons considerably reduces the ability of national communities to peacefully resolve their disputes.

The same applies to disarmament, which Benin considers crucial to the establishment of peace and the promotion of development. We call for the total and verifiable elimination from our planet of the threat of nuclear arms, as well as other types of weapons of mass destruction.

Since 11 September 2001 international terrorism has become one of the great challenges of our time. The international community must condemn terrorism and combat it in all its forms with determination — attacking the problem with a renewed political will to seek a lasting solution to the serious international problems that terrorism feeds on. We must, however, remember that in prosecuting that struggle it is imperative that we preserve the democratic freedoms that have been so dearly won by our citizens, and the open society, which is the essence of democracy.

Indeed, terrorism is not the monopoly of a single religion or nationality, much less that of a given civilization. It is not the concern of one particular category of countries. It is a global threat and, as a result, requires a global response. My country is sparing no effort to join the efforts of the international community in that area. It is in that spirit that we signed and carried out the ratification of 12 international conventions regarding the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

We have all acknowledged the need for reform, and for more than a decade have been involved in a multidimensional discussion in order to bring the institutional architecture of the United Nations system and its operating methods up to date in accordance with the changing realities the elements of the system were devised to confront.

The ultimate goal of reform is to better serve the ideals of the Organization and better meet the legitimate expectations of the people of the world in the face of the dangers confronting them today.

With respect to Security Council reform, most Member States have expressed the hope that the Security Council will become more representative of the international community as a whole, in the light of the considerable increase in the number of Member States — which have grown from 51 to 192 since the creation of the United Nations — and in the light of the fact that the new States have a certain weight demographically, economically and militarily.

I take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all Member States of the United Nations that, on 23 October 2003, voted for my country, Benin, to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2004-2005.

In the context of current discussions on Security Council reform, Benin believes that any reform of the Council must take into consideration the legitimate aspirations of the developing countries, in particular African countries, while maintaining the Council's effectiveness and good functioning.

Benin has no objection to the friendly countries of Japan, Germany and Brazil becoming permanent members of the Security Council. However, the extent, the nature and the modalities of the increase in Council membership should be based on the principles of equitable geographic distribution and the sovereign equality of States. Clearly, there cannot be a partial or selective increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Council that works to the detriment of the developing countries. In that context, Africa, like all regional groups, must have two permanent seats on the Security Council. Any other solution would cause a de facto disequilibrium and an overrepresentation of one regional group to the detriment of others. In other words, Africa justly demands two permanent seats and two non-permanent seats, in addition to the three it currently holds.

The right of veto should be extended to the new permanent members of the Security Council. In addition, the non-permanent members of the Council, in rotation, could be accorded the veto power during the month they hold the presidency, given the importance of that position.

The link between development and peace can be seen more clearly now than in the past. We are used to hearing those two concepts linked in the time-honoured saying that "development is the other name for peace". As national revenue grows, Governments have greater manoeuvring room to adopt social and economic policies that promote national integration and regional equilibrium.

Today, two years after the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg, we all agree on the importance of the progressive and harmonious attainment of the goals of sustainable development, in accordance with the outcome of our work at Johannesburg. If the environment is important, in no way can it be treated separately from other aspects of sustainable development. Rather, it is by reinforcing national development capacity, while supporting the activities of communities through high-impact programmes such as microfinancing, as proposed by the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility, that we can wage a radical campaign against extreme poverty and reduce the number of people living in poverty by 2015, as established in the Millennium Development Goals.

Those programmes provide opportunities to help us better protect natural resources. However, we will not allow the protection of the environment to become a limit to our country's economic growth. Sustainable development, properly understood, consists of integrating all dimensions into a coherent national policy.

In developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and especially Benin, where many efforts have been made to reinforce democracy, strengthen the decentralization process and fight poverty, communities and non-governmental organizations must be strengthened to decentralize management of the environment and thus promote development at the local level.

Also to fight poverty and better manage natural resources, we must remember that the Johannesburg

Summit identified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as one way to fight poverty and as a tool available to the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. When, at its sixtieth session, the General Assembly examines the progress made towards achieving those Goals, my delegation hopes that the Convention to Combat Desertification will take its rightful place in the discussions on the Millennium Project, led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

With respect to financial resources, we call on the international community to make the fourth replenishment of the Global Environment Fund even greater than the third and call for the issue of soil degradation and desertification to receive all the attention it deserves.

By adopting the 2001 Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010 at the conclusion of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Brussels, the international community established the key goal of doing everything possible to halve by 2015 the number of people living in extreme poverty and suffering hunger and to promote sustainable development in the developing countries.

In spite of the efforts made, the least developed countries continue to suffer from the burden of debt, leading to weakened measures for social protection, the impoverishment of vulnerable segments of society, rural migration and the depreciation of agricultural products, among other things.

In his mandate as Global Chair of the Bureau of the Least Developed Countries, President Mathieu Kérékou of the Republic of Benin took part from 28 to 30 June 2004 in the 2004 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council's substantive session, devoted to mobilizing resources and promoting an environment favourable to eliminating poverty, in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001-2010. The high-level segment identified real ways to mobilize external and internal resources to eliminate poverty through microfinancing, the promotion of small and medium-sized business and land tenure security.

The least developed countries, in particular those of Africa, must strive to strengthen partnerships with the international community, given that the prospects of their national economies raise the most doubts.

This year, Benin has again made its modest contribution to international efforts by convening an African Union regional conference on the family, in the framework of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family.

At that conference, Africa established an action plan on the African family, as well as strategies for its implementation. The action plan is based on the observation that Africa is undergoing three great transformations and is faced with enormous challenges that place increased pressure on families. In order to meet those challenges, we must adopt an integrated approach that places families at the centre of a comprehensive development programme to preserve the integrity of families.

African countries share the conviction that implementation of the nine priority areas of that action plan will make it possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the shortest possible time. The action plan has been issued as a United Nations document. We urge our development partners to give it all the necessary attention in order to pool resources to implement the plan, which can be considered a supplementary effort to better focus on human beings within their basic social milieu and according to their principal needs, with a view to attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

Encouraging efforts have been made in the areas of official development assistance, managing the foreign debt of heavily indebted countries and multinational trade negotiations — in particular those undertaken in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. They must be coherently pursued in order to achieve an overall improvement in the foreign environment for developing countries, in general, and for African countries, in particular.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the extension of the expiration date of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, as well as for the adoption of the general Framework for Establishing Modalities in Agriculture for multilateral trade negotiations under the Doha Work Programme, which is known as the July package. The general framework of negotiations on that document was based on the agreement of developed countries to bring domestic subsidies for their farmers to a level that permits farmers in the least developed countries to live off the fruits of their labours.

In that regard, I would like to emphasize that, as far as the sectoral Cotton Initiative is concerned — which should be the subject of separate and special treatment within a subcommittee — the development strategy for the cotton sector could encompass identifying market opportunities, the possibility of developing high-added-value activities and the establishment of bodies or mechanisms that make it possible to regulate and strengthen the market.

I would like to conclude my statement by reminding the Assembly that Benin will assume the presidency of the Security Council in February 2005. As part of its presidency, we plan to organize a ministerial conference in New York on the theme "Thinking about the future situation of child soldiers in Africa". One of the objectives envisaged for that debate will be to help find lasting solutions to the problem of child soldiers in Africa and to begin the process of developing an international legal instrument to prevent the recruitment of children into armies. Through that theme, we will hope to engage the international community in a genuine alliance to promote peace, security, political stability and development in Africa. We count on the support and participation of members of the Assembly in that conference, which will make it possible for us to defuse the time bomb represented by the issue of child soldiers. I therefore invite all members to make a contribution in order to bequeath a brighter tomorrow to future generations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency U Tin Winn, Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of the Union of Myanmar.

U Tin Winn (Myanmar): Allow me, first of all, to congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. I am fully confident that his wisdom and diplomatic skills will guide our deliberations to a fruitful outcome. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation to Mr. Julian Hunte for his able leadership and contributions to the success of the previous session. My delegation would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his selfless dedication to the cause of the United Nations.

The world today faces many daunting challenges. Most ominous and threatening among them are issues related to peace and security. Under those circumstances, it is worth recalling the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which were enunciated 50 years ago by Myanmar, along with China and India, to provide the basic principles for inter-State relations. The Principles were subsequently adopted by Asian and African leaders in the Bandung Declaration of 1955. The 1961 Belgrade Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement also adopted the Principles as basic tenets of the Movement. The United Nations itself endorsed the Principles. Founded on the premise of the essential unity of humankind, the Five Principles remain as relevant and valid today as on the day they were proclaimed.

Myanmar considers the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy and near-universal membership, as the sole multilateral forum for addressing urgent global issues. Recent events remind us of the futility of unilateralism and the danger of resorting to the use of force without the authorization of the United Nations.

Threats to the international system and the rapidly evolving international situation demand a thorough reform of the Organization and its mechanisms, structure and working methods. In that context, we would like to reiterate our views on the reform of the Organization, including that of the Security Council. The expansion and reform of the Security Council must be an integral part of a common package. If it is to become more representative and reflect contemporary political and economic realities, the Council should be expanded in both categories of membership. An ideal solution in the democratization process would be the abolition of the veto. Until that is done, its application should be limited. It is also our view that new permanent members of the Security Council should enjoy the same rights and privileges as current members.

Myanmar notes with interest the ongoing work of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

In this highly globalized world, regional cooperation, including South-South cooperation, can well complement international cooperation. As a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, Myanmar is actively involved in the Association's activities aimed at promoting regional peace, stability and prosperity and at enhancing cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Terrorism is one of the most serious challenges that the world faces today. It threatens national sovereignty and violates human rights, including the right to life. Last year, terrorists carried their war to the doorstep of the United Nations. They cruelly extinguished the lives of 22 innocent persons, including that of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, at United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. More recently, we have seen wanton acts of terrorism in diverse parts of the world, from Beslan to Jakarta to Madrid. Myanmar unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and joins the international community in calling for concerted action to combat the menace in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law.

We have never permitted the use of our territory for hostile acts against any State. We have neither provided assistance to those involved in terrorist acts nor safe haven to them, and we never will.

Myanmar is doing its utmost to combat this menace at the national, regional and international levels. Myanmar has signed, or acceded to, 11 of the 12 international legal instruments related to the suppression of terrorism. It is also actively involved in the Bali Process to combat transnational crime, including international terrorism.

The illicit trafficking in drugs is another challenge that is closely linked to other transnational crimes. Success in the war against drugs will contribute to a successful outcome in the fight against transnational crime. Myanmar accords topmost priority to the suppression and eradication of narcotic drugs. A 15-year national plan is targeted at the eradication of narcotic drugs in the country by the year 2014. In the last decade, Myanmar seized and destroyed drugs valued at more than $14.5 billion.

Figures from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration show that over a span of eight years, from 1996 to 2003, poppy cultivation declined steadily, by 71 per cent, while opium production decreased by 81 per cent. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has acknowledged Myanmar's commitment to the anti-drug campaign.

In recent years the problem of synthetic drugs has also surfaced. The illicit drugs chain begins with inadequate control of the trade in precursor chemicals. It bears repetition that my country does not produce precursor chemicals used in the production of narcotic drugs. We would like to urge countries that produce precursor chemicals to institute effective regulatory controls. Without precursor chemicals there can be no amphetamine-type synthetic drugs.

Myanmar is determined in its fight against drugs. It has established bilateral, trilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation to rid the world of this scourge.

Some Western countries allege that Myanmar is not adequately addressing the issue of trafficking in persons. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, Myanmar views trafficking in persons as an evil that must be suppressed through concerted action. In that connection, Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on 30 March of this year. A national law against human trafficking is being drafted in accordance with that Convention. Next month, Myanmar will host the meeting of the six-nation Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking.

Allegations of human rights violations in Myanmar are aimed at discrediting the Government for political purposes. Myanmar believes that the question of human rights is an important issue. It should be addressed with objectivity and impartiality, and without selectivity. Myanmar has consistently cooperated with the United Nations on human rights issues. In that context, a national Human Rights Committee has already been established and human rights awareness is being introduced in school curricula nationwide, as well as through workshops.

An interview conducted by a politically motivated non-governmental organization with 25 or so insurgents inside a neighbouring country became the basis of a report that there are 70,000 child soldiers in the Myanmar national armed forces. That is a far-fetched conclusion. The falsehood found its way into the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in 2002 (S/2002/1299). The report subsequently became the resource document in the Security Council's ensuing thematic debate on children and armed conflict.

I wish, first of all, to firmly reiterate that Myanmar is not a nation in armed conflict. It is a nation at peace. Secondly, I wish to clearly state that children not permitted to be recruited into the armed services in Myanmar, either by law or in practice. A preventive programme was in place in my country even before Security Council resolutions were adopted on this theme. In that regard, the Chairman of our Committee on the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers recently received the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative in Myanmar to explore ways and means to enhance cooperation. The representative was afforded the opportunity to visit the army recruitment centre near Yangon, and subsequently the army recruitment centre in Mandalay together with the United Nations Resident Coordinator. Myanmar is finalizing an action plan and is cooperating with UNICEF in that regard. It will also continue its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Allow me to turn to developments in my country. Peace and stability have been restored. We are taking steps to ensure a smooth transition to a peaceful, democratic modern State. Myanmar places the highest priority on national reconciliation to achieve unity among its 135 national races. In order to strengthen ties and promote the economic and social development of the national races inhabiting the border areas, the Government has expended 58 billion kyats and more than $550 million in infrastructure development that includes communication networks and education and health facilities, thus promoting the quality of life of those citizens.

Notwithstanding the unilateral sanctions of some Western countries, Myanmar has been able to develop its economy and promote the well-being of its people. We have achieved this by relying mainly on our own resources, and with the assistance and cooperation of our neighbours.

Noteworthy advances have been made in the health and education sectors. The country now has 757 hospitals, with 140 hospitals having been added in the last 15 years. In the past year alone, 22 new hospitals were commissioned. Over the same period, the number of colleges and universities in the country has increased from 32 to 154. Enrolment has risen dramatically in those institutions, from 120,000 to 890,000 students.

The President returned to the Chair.

Allow me now to turn to recent political developments in my country. In August 2003, the Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, announced a seven-step road map for transition to democracy. The road map has been well received in the country, as well as by our neighbours. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit last November welcomed the commitment of the Myanmar Government to effect a transition to democracy.

The first and most crucial step of the road map, the reconvening of the National Convention, was taken on 17 May of this year. The current Convention is being attended by 1,088 delegates from eight strata, representing all walks of life. It is more inclusive than the previous Convention, which was attended by only about 700 delegates.

Moreover, 60 per cent of the delegates to the current Convention are from the national races. Over 100 delegates represent 17 major armed groups and 17 smaller armed groups, which have returned to the legal fold. In the previous Convention, representatives of three or four armed groups which had just returned to the legal fold were present as observers.

During the first session, the sensitive issue of power-sharing between the central Government and the states and regions was the main focus of discussion. Indeed, power-sharing is a vital and delicate issue, as the country is now evolving from a unitary Government structure to a union structure, where states and regions will have their own executive and legislative bodies. Delegates held extensive discussions on that issue. Because of the complex and sensitive nature of the deliberations, discussions were time-consuming and sometimes intense. After a successful first session, the Convention adjourned on 9 July.

Myanmar is a union of 135 national races, and unity is key to achieving our vision of a prosperous democratic State. We are greatly encouraged by the results of the first session. The common desire to ensure the success of the seven-step road map was evident. Preparations are under way for the second session, which is to be convened in the forthcoming open season. Once agreement is reached on the fundamental principles in the National Convention, a new constitution will be drafted. The draft text will be put to a referendum for the people of Myanmar to decide upon. After the adoption of the new constitution, there will be free and fair elections, in which the people will elect leaders of their choice.

The new political structure needs to be strong and resilient, and the country united. The future of the nation cannot be determined by one individual or one party acting alone. There is no alternative to the National Convention. It is the sole process through which the aspirations of the people of Myanmar to establish a modern and democratic nation can be fulfilled. We cannot allow the National Convention to be derailed under any circumstances. Failure would plunge the nation into the abyss of anarchy. That is the reason why we set such store on the successful outcome of the National Convention. We are determined that this vital national endeavour will be crowned with success.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sergei N. Martynov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Martynov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): For decades now we have been hearing very disturbing questions from this rostrum: Where is our world heading?, Where is the United Nations going? At the dawn of the millennium those questions are becoming increasingly burning issues. The world has changed. The pendulum of history has swung to the other side. There is new violence, a wave of terrorism, local wars and ethnic conflicts, behind which lie growing poverty and a widening gap in development between countries. Those are not just someone else's problems; they are common global challenges for all of us. What kind of common house do we want? I believe that we primarily want a safe house, where our children will not die at the hands of terrorists or from hunger, sickness, anti-personnel mines, smart bombs or missiles.

What, then, must we do? The answer is clear: we must establish a valid system of international security that includes military, economic, environmental, social and information elements — a system based on the rule of law in domestic and international affairs. The answer is clear, but it is difficult to do it. During the Assembly's last session, Belarus made the rule of law in international relations the main focus of its statement. The fact that that theme has been a leitmotif of the present general debate inspires a certain hope in us, namely, that the goal is a realistic one.

No right-thinking person can remain indifferent today to the heinous acts of terrorism that have characterized the start of the twenty-first century. The usual approaches, based on selfishness and unilateral advantage, are not enough to crush this evil. We need non-traditional, long-term, comprehensive solutions. Who can provide them, and how? Only the United Nations, by playing its crucial role, can do so. The Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) must become a real, practical tool for curbing the growth in international terrorism: strengthening the anti-terrorism coalition under the auspices of the United Nations, monitoring the implementation of the provisions of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and putting an end to the practice of double standards vis-à-vis terrorists and terrorism.

In practical terms, establishing a direct link between the CTC and regional organizations and holding more open Security Council meetings at the ministerial level could really help in the global struggle against terrorism, under the banner of the United Nations. However, such a struggle can be successful only if our common goal is to strengthen a just and humane world system. Belarus will do its utmost in that struggle.

On 1 March 2004, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction entered into force in Belarus. We have the world's seventh largest stockpile of landmines, which we inherited from the former Soviet Union. We do not produce or export mines; nor do we use them at home or anywhere else in the world. However, guided by our common concerns and interests, we ratified the Ottawa Convention and are now counting on assistance from the international community to destroy our stockpile of mines.

Tomorrow we will deposit my country's instruments of ratification for such important international disarmament agreements as the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Today's most important challenges include illegal migration, transborder crime, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons and the security of energy infrastructure. In combating those threats, Belarus, which stands at a major European crossroads, is a significant factor in the stability of Europe. Our country is also playing a major role in the Europe-Asia transport of energy resources. Today we call on our neighbours, NATO and the European Union to organize regional cooperation to ensure the security of critical infrastructure, such as oil and gas pipelines and power stations, including nuclear ones. Belarus has already announced its readiness to dedicate troops and resources to international structures in support of those goals. The contribution of Belarus to regional and international security, which began in the areas of nuclear and conventional disarmament in the early 1990s, continues to be a real and significant one. We are grateful to other countries and to international organizations for their assistance in the area of border and customs infrastructure.

Double standards are becoming an increasingly important problem, and not only vis-à-vis terrorism. That objectionable instrument is being used primarily against States that are bold enough to follow their own foreign policy, rather than submitting to the dictates of the world's power centres. A leader is not a dictator, and certainly not a messiah. The practice of double standards today applies primarily to the Euro-Atlantic space. But strenuous efforts are being made to introduce it in the United Nations. That would present a danger to the stability and effectiveness of the United Nations system. Belarus calls on all States that are not indifferent to the independence of the United Nations and to the role it plays not to allow that to happen.

Economic security is a very important condition for sustainable development. That is a very remote concept for most of the countries of the world. As the only European State that is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belarus would like to stress that the concept of centre versus periphery pits developed countries against developing countries in the industrial arena. It is also a concept that is clearly in crisis, and one that will slow us down in the search for a solution to problems of economic development.

Only seven of the 50 least developed countries have achieved a 7 per cent growth rate, which is prerequisite to halving the number of people living in absolute poverty by the year 2015. One person dies of hunger every four seconds. That is just a figure, but the very banality of that statement does reveal the monstrosity of the problem and how terrible is the world's indifference to it. The difficulty of the undertaking should not stop us from seeking ways to resolve the problem of poverty. That is why Belarus supports President Lula da Silva's initiative to fight hunger and poverty in the world.

Despite the transitional period and the collapse of our economy, my country — a large area of the former Soviet Union — was the first to solve the problem of malnutrition. Now, we are waging a struggle against poverty. Since 1995, we have almost halved the number of people living in poverty in Belarus, with the figure this year being about 20 per cent.

The difficulties we have experienced have not stopped us from providing economic assistance to developing countries. We have unilaterally extended trade preferences to the overwhelming majority of developing countries.

We are disturbed by a possible lessening of United Nations attention to issues involving countries with economies in transition. Belarus regards the role of United Nations programmes and funds as important to the development assistance provided to countries with economies in transition. However, under current conditions — in which some States of the region are approaching the level of the Group of Eight (G-8) and others have macroeconomic indicators that barely exceed those of least developed countries — that assistance must be carefully targeted. That means that, in planning country programmes, account must be taken of countries' socio-economic development and the degree of their integration into the world economy and financial institutions. We intend to make that approach the basis of a draft General Assembly resolution, and we hope that members will support it.

The problems associated with financing for development are extremely topical today for developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Last year's two-day High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development was not enough to put in place ongoing monitoring of the implementation of the decisions of the International Conference on Financing for Development. That will require an independent body of the Economic and Social Council.

Belarus believes that the 2005 New York summit on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals will provide real impetus to all initiatives aimed at stimulating economic development.

Narrowing the technological and information divide between developed and developing countries must be our common concern.

At the 2003 Geneva World Summit on the Information Society, the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, strongly urged the establishment of a trust fund to offset losses incurred by producers who provide software to developing countries at reduced costs. The format and mechanism for such a fund should be defined by a task force within the context of preparing for the 2005 summit.

Having experienced the Chernobyl disaster, Belarus is acutely aware of one fact: we cannot disregard the problem of radiation security. The consequences are too enormous in scope, and too incompatible with the long-term survival of the human race. The United Nations must not lessen its attention to the problem of overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. We support the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency to implement a nuclear non-proliferation regime and to strengthen nuclear and radiation security.

Looking to the future to seek ways to ensure normal living conditions for people living in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster: that will be the theme of an international conference to be held in Minsk in 2006, on the sad anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. We invite all interested States, the leadership of the Secretariat and international organizations to participate in the preparations for the conference and in the event itself.

The United Nations has often been criticized. There have been many pessimistic analyses of its work and its potential. A great deal of that has been fair, but let us look the truth straight in the eyes: there is no alternative to the United Nations as a mechanism for collectively resolving global and regional issues. Nor is there an alternative to multilateralism. The reality of life convinces us of that more and more each day.

Belarus looks forward with great interest to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Belarus urges the Panel to take account of the consolidated position of the countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement as it works on its proposals to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations reform.

A key purpose of that work must be to correct the imbalance in the membership of the Security Council and in the Organization as a whole, as well as to promote respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution of Council seats. We believe there should be an increase in the category of non-permanent members, taking account of the interests of all the regional groups. We also believe in increasing the number of permanent members, including representatives from the three developing regions — Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean — as well as from two developed States, from Europe and Asia respectively, that have made the most tangible contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Let me return to the disturbing questions I posed at the beginning of my statement. Where is the world heading? Where is the United Nations going? The answer to the first question must be that it depends upon the United Nations. That is the main point. So far, however, that has not been reflected in the world situation. That is a harsh truth, but the truth nonetheless. We must change that situation. We can do so. It is in our common interest and in the interest of small and large States alike, as well as of both rich and developing countries. It is in the interest of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Oskanian (Armenia): We wish to extend our congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. We would also like to thank to Mr. Julian Hunte and the Secretary-General for their efforts during this difficult year.

Last year, we expressed our concern about the restoration of sovereignty in Iraq and the reinvigoration of the Middle East peace process. This year, we wish especially to note the critical need to end the tragedy in Darfur. Armenians, victims of the twentieth century's first genocide, know well the long-lasting effects of victimization and homelessness. This is no way to begin a new millennium. The benefits of globalization should be utilized to overcome this newest global crisis.

We also comprehend all too well that peace and security abroad and at home are clearly associated with social and economic dignity today — or with faith in their possible attainment tomorrow. Neither self-satisfied smugness on the one hand nor self-righteous violence on the other are solutions to the great inequalities that exist around the world and within each of our countries, even the most developed of them.

Terrorism, in all its manifestations, affects security and political and economic stability in our neighbourhoods and throughout our planet. Terrorism, from Madrid to Beslan, in all its manifestations, is inexcusable and unacceptable. Cognizant that the success of counter-terrorism efforts is dependent upon collective measures, Armenia has readily joined the global fight against international terrorism. That fight must go beyond effective regional and international cooperation. It must include the very goals of the Millennium Declaration: replacing deprivation, poverty and injustice with universal respect for human rights and democracy, economic development, equality and social justice.

In Armenia we have had a year in which economic growth went hand in hand with increased participation in international organizations, particularly in the United Nations. Our position in the Human Development Index gives us the confidence to continue on our path of economic development. We will also work hard to bolster public-private partnerships. We are proud that Armenia's major enterprises are finding ways to contribute to art and culture, to invest in public life and to become partners in our society's pursuit of happiness and quality of life.

In 2005, the international community will review the progress that has been made in the implementation of the global development agenda. It would be most useful if we could focus our resources on the implementation of the agenda rather than on restating our collective good intentions. In other words, we must find the political will to make the political and financial commitments necessary to overcome the outstanding obstacles.

The Millennium Development Goals are guidelines for Armenia. To that end, the empowerment of women, the protection of children and the fight against poverty are not just goals for us: they are building blocks for a prosperous, healthy and stable society. The Government of Armenia has approved national action plans on the protection of the rights of the child, on improving the status of women and enhancing their role in our society and on preventing trafficking in persons. In addition, a broad anti-corruption strategy, developed with the participation and counsel of the international community, will complement the poverty reduction strategy programme that is already beginning to yield results.

We are continuing our effective collaboration with United Nations bodies on a number of important issues, including use of information and communication technologies to improve governance and institutionalize public/private interactions. With donor community support, focused institution-building and good governance, we expect that the human rights and democratic reforms of the past decade will go beyond the solid legislative framework that has already been developed and will take root — psychologically and socially — in our society.

Armenia, as an active member of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights, will remain involved in international development cooperation. At the same time, we will participate in the effort to improve the consultation and coordination mechanisms that are essential for the effectiveness of the collective security system and we look forward to the assessment of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

We stand for broader cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations to ensure the broader involvement and commitment of countries in decision-making and implementation processes. Reform is necessary within those valued organizations if we are to effectively address today's realities and challenges and resolve tomorrow's problems. To do that, we cannot work with yesterday's mechanisms. A revitalized General Assembly is indispensable for effective United Nations action. We would also support Japan, Germany and India joining countries from Africa and Latin America as permanent members of an enlarged and more representative Security Council.

In a few short years, Armenia has done away with the false proposition that we must choose between East and West, between the old world and the new. We have done away with the myth that our neighbours can control the pace of our economic development and shape its direction. Now we want to do away with the very dangerous notion that yesterday's adversaries are enemies forever.

Armenia is ready to compromise and collaborate with neighbours who are ready to join us in making history, not rewriting it. We want to work with an Azerbaijan that understands its place in a rule-based international order, not one whose policies, practices and statements threaten the fragile peace and stability of our region.

Azerbaijan was the first to introduce ethnic cleansing in the Soviet space, the first to engage mercenaries and international terrorists in its own defence and the first to discard the "rules of engagement" in international organizations.

Let me explain. The Armenian presence in the region of the Caucasus has been long and extensive. Indeed, denying or rewriting that history requires systematic planning, energy and resources. Unfortunately, the Government of Azerbaijan has not spared those resources. Azerbaijan succeeded in eliminating the Armenians of Nakhichevan, who comprised more than half the population there. There were more than 400,000 Armenians living in Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. The pogroms of Sumgait and Baku led to the fact that there are none today. Indeed, the Azerbaijani experiment in ethnic cleansing worked.

A decade ago, Azerbaijan retained the services of mercenaries and international terrorists — the same names we hear today — to fight against the Armenian men and women who were defending their own lands and homes against aerial bombings and proximate shelling. The terrorists lost, Armenians won.

Finally, Azerbaijan's leadership dismisses the opportunities offered by membership in international organizations to build bridges and seek solutions. Today, Azerbaijan rejects mediation by those who wish to help halt drug trafficking through its territory. It dismisses efforts by the Council of Europe and other monitoring groups to come to the region and see with their own eyes, at first hand, the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable historic and cultural markers. Azerbaijan squawks about its desire for NATO membership, even as it repeatedly prohibits a partner's participation in NATO exercises. Worse, Azerbaijan not only does not rebuke, it champions the Azerbaijani military officer who decapitated a fellow Armenian officer in a NATO training course in Budapest. It maligns the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to hide its own refusal to consider the proposals that have grown from the discussions and negotiations in which its own leadership has participated. For more than half a decade, Azerbaijan has rejected every proposal before it from the "common State" proposal in 1998 to the Key West document of 2001.

Armenians prevailed in the military confrontation unleashed by Azerbaijan in response to the peaceful demands of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination. Contrary to the assertion made by Azerbaijan's President from this podium, Armenians have occupied those lands for over 2,000 years, and not just the last 10. Today, Nagorno-Karabakh has reversed the injustice done by Stalin back in the mid-1920s. It is free, democratic and tolerant of minorities. Nagorno-Karabakh holds regular elections, has State and security structures, completely controls its own territory and has a growing economy.

If in the past century Armenians and Azerbaijanis were forcibly linked together, in the present century — in which we have won the right to our own destinies — we can determine to live together peaceably. If we are serious about becoming full, deserving residents of the European neighbourhood — where borders do not count, but intentions and tolerance do — we will have to come to terms with our past, with our history and with the realities that have gripped our region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Momodu Koroma, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Koroma (Sierra Leone): I would like to join others in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your election to direct the affairs of the General Assembly — this great parliament of nations — at its fifty-ninth session. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Julian Hunte, especially for the momentum he gave to the ongoing process of the revitalization of the General Assembly.

Once again, in his annual report on the work of the Organization and in his forthright statement to the Assembly last week, the Secretary-General set the tone of the annual general debate. My delegation commends him for his tenacity and courage under extreme political circumstances and shares his overall assessment of the current international situation and the role of the United Nations.

Just a little more than three weeks ago, on the initiative of the member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Assembly reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of international cooperation. It was, indeed, a reaffirmation that this Organization was founded on international cooperation and that its efficacy is rooted in international cooperation. My delegation therefore urges all Member States to adhere to the principle of cooperation.

Sierra Leone believes, and will continue to believe in the United Nations. After all, we are part of the United Nations, like each and every State represented in the General Assembly. Of course there are some difficulties, but we strongly believe that, given adequate resources and cooperative support in a timely manner and given the necessary moral and political support, the United Nations can deliver, as it has done admirably in Sierra Leone.

In that connection, allow me to express our sincere appreciation to all the countries that have contributed to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Our thanks also go out to the staff of all the agencies and programmes of the United Nations family and the non-governmental organizations that have worked in partnership with the United Nations, the Government and civil society to restore peace and stability in our country and, most recently, to conduct local government elections.

A theme that has reverberated within the Hall in the past week, and in other international forums, is the observance of the rule of law. The Secretary-General's analysis of its significance needs no embellishment. The causes and character of the conflict in Sierra Leone, perhaps more than in any other country in the world in recent times, tell us that nearly everything crumbles when the rule of law collapses and that, therefore, it should be made the pillar of post-conflict reconstruction, national recovery, governance and administration of justice and the cornerstone of lasting peace.

While the Government of Sierra Leone is struggling, albeit with limited resources, to reform its own administration of justice, it is also concerned about the financial situation of the Special Court, established in the country to address impunity. The efficacy, and indeed the credibility of the Court, could be questioned unless urgent measures are taken to address its budgetary problems. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to appeal for continued voluntary contributions, as well as the requested subventions from the regular budget of the United Nations for the Special Court.

As President Kabbah said at the formal opening of the courthouse last March, it is

> "a Special Court for Sierra Leone, a symbol of the rule of law and an essential element in the pursuit of peace, justice and national reconciliation for the people of Sierra Leone. It is also a Special Court for the international community, a symbol of the rule of international law."

There is no guarantee that the victims of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during the civil war in Sierra Leone will receive reparation for those heinous crimes. So the least we can do for them now is to ensure that justice is done. We can do so by reducing the financial burden of the Special Court and by demonstrating that we are indeed serious about respect for the rule of law.

The United Nations was formed over 50 years ago as a response to the peace and security needs of the era of its birth. Since then, the world has experienced, and continues to experience, fundamental changes, to which the United Nations should adapt. That is why Sierra Leoneans continue to follow with profound interest the consultative processes for the revitalization of the General Assembly and reforms in the Security Council in order to reflect the reality of the contemporary world. My delegation wishes to urge the President to sustain the momentum in the processes generated by the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The menace of terrorism and local conflicts continues to impede peace, stability and development in many parts of the world. Innocent victims aside, conflicts have reversed the development gains of poor countries, and even reduced them to the status of donor-dependants. While deploring all acts of terrorism, it is important to recognize that poor countries, particularly those emerging from conflict, have weak capacity to fight terrorism. If global action is what is needed to fight terrorism and my delegation believes that this should be the case, efforts should be made to enhance the capacity of poor countries to play their own role in that battle.

After about 11 years of a violent and destructive civil conflict, Sierra Leone is now in the delicate post-conflict phase. It is in that phase that the root causes of the conflict should be addressed and the foundation for permanent peace, stability and sustainable development should be laid. In short, that is the phase in which the gains of the peace effort should be maximized, using a synergetic approach that incorporates development and other strands of generators of peace into peacekeeping. But this approach needs resources and planning beyond the traditional peacekeeping strategies that involve pulling out when the guns fall silent.

It is in that regard that my delegation is soliciting continued and enhanced support for post-conflict Sierra Leone. An important component of this appeal is that development and financial institutions should understand the multifaceted demands and delicate character of post-conflict situations and treat them as special cases. That means that those institutions should revisit their rigid and standard prescriptions, with the purpose of making them flexible and responsive to the special requirements of post-conflict situations.

Ten days ago, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNAMSIL to June 2005. The Government of Sierra Leone has endorsed the Secretary-General's assessment and recommendations regarding the benchmarks for the residual presence of UNAMSIL in the country. We note in particular that, over the next several months, the Security Council will review the residual functions against the capacity of the Sierra Leone armed forces and police to maintain security and stability effectively throughout the country. We hope that the review will also take into consideration the security situation in the subregion.

I would like to reassure the international community through the Assembly that we do not expect UNAMSIL to remain in Sierra Leone indefinitely. The Government of Sierra Leone is determined to ensure a smooth and seamless transition from UNAMSIL to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the police throughout the country. The restructured army and the police have already demonstrated through training, discipline and performance that they are nearly ready to assume full responsibility for the security and safety of the people of Sierra Leone. But training is only a part of the total picture of readiness. For effective operational readiness, both the army and the police need logistical support and equipment. Accordingly, my delegation wishes to appeal to friendly nations for assistance to equip our security forces to enable them to function effectively. Meanwhile, for obvious reasons, the Government and people of Sierra Leone are encouraged by the prospects for consolidating the deployment of the United Nations peacekeeping mission throughout neighbouring Liberia.

Recent dialogue between, and among, the leaders of the Mano River Union also augur well for peace and stability in our subregion. We need the continued support of the international community in resuscitating the objectives and programmes of the Mano River Union, because, if fully functional, it can complement the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations in the subregion. In that connection, I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his encouragement of the rejuvenation process of the Union.

The United Nations has already identified many of the root causes of armed conflict within States. With the assistance of the international community, efforts are being made to address those root causes. The objective is to prevent the recurrence of armed conflicts. My delegation believes that equal attention should also be paid to the root causes of armed conflict across States, including the senseless acts of international terrorism that are being perpetrated in many parts of the world. While prompt, effective and decisive measures are absolutely necessary to deal with the phenomenon, it is about time that we try to identify and address the root causes of such ignoble acts.

New challenges are emerging and new threats are being hatched in various corners of our world with unprecedented frequency. However, we must not forget the old, unresolved challenges and threats to human safety and security. Without prejudging the outcome of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, Sierra Leone hopes that the Panel's report will help to throw some light on the probable link between what could be described as old and still existing threats and those now being characterized as new threats and challenges. Perhaps, as President Kabbah suggested at the Millennium Summit four years ago, the old and still existing challenges are taking on a new form and new dimensions. What we are experiencing is, perhaps, the transmutation of threats and challenges.

In speaking of old challenges and threats, the question of Palestine comes to mind. It has been on our agenda for far too long. We know that that is a complex issue. However, the longer it remains unresolved, the greater the risk of unending cycles of violence. Sierra Leone firmly believes that an equitable solution, in particular the establishment of an independent Palestinian State side by side with Israel within secure borders, would be a giant step towards peace and security, not only in the Middle East but also in the rest of our troubled and unsafe world.

Still in the area of existing threats to international peace and security, my delegation is disturbed by the tragic humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of the Sudan. We applaud the response of the African Union to the crisis and urge all stakeholders to do whatever is necessary to speedily resolve the conflict. But let me emphasize that the African Union would like to do more — and would do more if it had the resources. Accordingly, I would like to make an open appeal, on behalf of the African Union Commission, for financial and material support for the African Union to enable it to deal with the situation.

The Government and the people of Sierra Leone know from experience that ceasefire, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are essential components of peace. But we are still faced with the daunting task of consolidating the peace, because peace goes far beyond the process of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. The consolidation of peace — real peace — means improvements in the lives and livelihoods of all our people. It means jobs, food, education, health care, adequate housing and other social services. As the Secretary-General observed in his most recent report on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, considerable progress has been made towards economic and social recovery. However, in order to sustain the process of consolidating peace and to facilitate the smooth transition from recovery to sustainable development, Sierra Leone needs continued support, particularly for vulnerable areas of the country.

We look forward to the 2005 comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals — a review that will coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. We in Sierra Leone will also be reviewing the state of our food security goal of ensuring that by the end of 2007, no Sierra Leonean will go to bed hungry. Our food security goal must be seen in the context of one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, namely, the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger. Given the grave consequences of extreme poverty and starvation, those are realistic goals. They represent the minimum standard necessary to save lives. They are attainable.

We know that it is our responsibility to do more for ourselves. We also know the urgency of addressing the democratic deficit in international economic and financial decision-making. In our interdependent and increasingly globalizing world, economic and social inequities within countries are a reflection of unfair rules, unfair trade practices and an uneven playing field in international transactions. The Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Juan Somavia, was correct when he told the recent African Union summit in Ouagadougou that good national governance will not succeed unless we have good global governance.

Consumers need to share, in a more equitable manner with producers in the developing world, the benefits derived from their abundant natural and human resources. That means, among other things, fair prices and debt relief, all of which should have a positive impact on our capacity to reduce poverty within our respective developing countries.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gábor Bródi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary.

Mr. Bródi (Hungary): I would like to take this opportunity to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. You may safely count on my delegation's full support in the discharge of your important responsibilities.

Hungary is firmly committed to effective multilateralism as a key tool of its foreign policy. Well-functioning international organizations and institutions having broad political support in the international community can and should, indeed, play a significant role in addressing the challenges of our globalized world.

We are looking forward with eager expectation to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, set up by the

Secretary-General, to be finalized later this year. Addressing the complex and difficult tasks that we are facing today needs not only strong political will on the part of all of us, but also an improved and adapted multilateral framework of cooperation.

Only a system of international institutions whose activities and form of operation are renewed and adjusted to the realities of our contemporary world can be effective as an instrument in addressing successfully the threats and challenges.

Hungary remains strongly committed to making the United Nations more effective. To this end, the United Nations, including the Security Council, must adapt to the changing circumstances of the political landscape.

New and emerging threats, including international terrorism, the danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, transnational organized crime and failing States are all grave menaces. The role played by Member States in prevention and early warning should therefore be stronger than ever. These challenges are global or regional in nature and, in our view, the response to them must be at the same level. Without such enhanced cooperation among the members of the international community, all efforts are doomed to be fruitless.

Heinous acts of terrorism such as those that caused immense human suffering in New York, Washington, D.C., Bali, Istanbul, Madrid and, recently, the Russian Federation, should be considered brutal attacks against the values of democracies. By putting innocent lives at risk, they also seek to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies.

Along with our partners in the European Union, Hungary strongly condemns all forms of terrorism. In this regard, we fully support the important work of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee. We hope that its reinvigorated activity, including planned visits by the Committee to Member States, will contribute to the enhancement of our capabilities in combating terrorism. It is of the utmost importance to provide assistance in strengthening the preparedness of those countries that are eager to tackle the menace originating from their territory.

Substantial work has been undertaken on freezing funds and financial resources to prevent the financing of terrorism. The United Nations has to continue to be a key player in that fight. To achieve real and tangible results in that regard, we have to ensure full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the accession of the largest possible number of States to international conventions and protocols to combat terrorism. Hungary has done its part to that end.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery continues to be a clear and present threat to international peace and security. New discoveries of large-scale nuclear-weapon programmes, networks of illicit trafficking in nuclear material and technology and the ill-conceived policies of denial and deceit about the purpose and nature of such programmes remain a most serious concern to the international community. There is a growing recognition, shared by Hungary, that those programmes also represent the most serious risks of proliferation. The danger of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons falling into the hands of rogue States, terrorist groups or, for that matter, any other non-State actors that menace our world, gives rise to new, major security challenges. In that regard, we must act together in a decisive manner, both regionally and globally.

In that respect, Hungary strongly supports the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004), which calls on all States to establish effective national export controls. We urge full implementation of that resolution and are prepared to assist others in doing so.

In our fast-changing world security environment, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is and should remain the cornerstone of the universal non-proliferation regime. Along with our European Union partners, we are committed to safeguarding the Treaty's authority and integrity. In that context, we are looking forward to the Seventh Review Conference of the NPT next year.

We should continue our efforts in the field of conflict prevention and post-conflict crisis management. For millions of people in conflict areas, those efforts mean hope for peace and a better, more secure future.

We are confident that the joint efforts of the Iraqi people and the international community will lead to a democratic and prosperous Iraq living in peace with itself and its neighbours. Hungary strongly condemns the terrorist acts and the kidnappings aimed at undermining the political and reconstruction process in that much-suffering country. The contribution of the United Nations is essential for success. Our Organization has already proven to be effective in advancing the political process when it seemed to have come to a standstill.

Hungary continues to contribute, along with coalition forces, to the stabilization and the improvement of security conditions in Iraq. We deem it important that relevant international organizations and institutions increase their joint efforts towards that end, including through the training of Iraqi security personnel.

At this moment, our priorities in Iraq must be to assist preparations for the national elections and the drafting of a new constitution. Security Council resolution 1546 (2004) provides a key role for the United Nations in the political transition process. Its ample experience in establishing democratic institutions, the rule of law, the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and electoral assistance can and should be utilized.

Hungary views the potentially successful realization of the presidential and the subsequent parliamentary elections in Afghanistan as important steps towards the normalization of the political situation in that country. We welcome the fact that despite unsatisfactory security conditions, progress is being made on preparations for the presidential elections to be held in October this year.

Hungary is deeply concerned about the continued violence in the Middle East, where substantial progress is yet to be achieved. We remain convinced that full and unconditional implementation of the road map offers the best chance for the parties directly involved to live side by side in peace and security. We urge all involved, including the Quartet, to redouble their efforts to that end.

The situation in the Balkans continues to remain at the centre of our attention. Overall developments in the region and the efforts of the international community have resulted in a calm but fragile political environment. In that respect, Hungary is committed to maintaining its presence in the international missions, in the service of peace and stability, in that region which is so close to us.

In that connection, we are following with serious concern the deterioration of the human rights situation in our immediate neighbourhood — in Serbia and Montenegro. It is particularly alarming that the number of incidents perpetrated against the non-Serb population, including the Hungarian community, is on the rise. Hungary once again calls upon the Serbian authorities to take the necessary measures to stop and to prevent those violent acts, as well as to identify, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of serious crimes of physical abuse, as well as psychological threats and intimidation. We are looking forward to the results of the international monitoring currently under way.

International protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the core of the foreign policy of Hungary. It is not only an expression of support for the universal values we feel so close to our hearts. It is also an essential prerequisite for preserving human dignity and enhancing liberty in our contemporary world. Freedom of the individual and full respect for the rights of human beings are matters well above the authority of any given State.

In today's world, we could hardly find a country where everyone speaks the same language or shares the same culture, beliefs and traditions. The presence of different national, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups within the borders of a country is not only an asset but also a source of social and cultural enrichment. It is our firm belief that the United Nations, as the most comprehensive multilateral organization, has a major role to play in the promotion of respect for, and the observance of, human rights, including the rights of national minorities.

Against that background, the international community should continue to examine all possible ways to promote and establish an early-warning mechanism or a monitoring body dealing with minority-related situations. That should include the options of nominating a Special Rapporteur on minorities and elaborating a legally binding universal document to address shortcomings.

Next year, with a major event, will be particularly important for the United Nations. In the course of addressing the burning issues on our agenda, we have to take a long, hard look at our tasks, including the review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, adopted by heads of State and Government in 2000. In our view, the review exercise requires careful preparation, vision, political determination and the courage to act. Hungary is ready and willing to take part in this process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, Secretary for Relations with States of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Lajolo (Holy See): The Holy See is honoured to take part in the general debate of the General Assembly of the United Nations for the first time since the Assembly adopted resolution 58/314 on 1 July 2004, which formalized and specified the rights and prerogatives of its status as a Permanent Observer, a status which the Holy See has enjoyed since 1964.

It is therefore my pleasant duty to express sincere gratitude to all the Member States. In approving the aforesaid resolution, they signalled once again the particular bond of cooperation between the Apostolic See and the United Nations, already underlined by Pope John Paul II on his first visit to this Assembly exactly 25 years ago. In this significant circumstance, I am honoured to convey to you, Sir, and to all of you gathered here to represent your noble countries, the respectful and cordial greetings of Pope John Paul II. I bring a special greeting to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and also to his worthy assistants. Their work, as recorded in the annual report of the Secretary General (A/59/1) with reference, above all, to conflict prevention and peacekeeping in the world, deserves the appreciation and gratitude of us all.

Several of the themes included in the agenda of the General Assembly may be considered essential for attaining the supreme objective of peace and for the future of humanity. To quote only a few: the United Nations and a new global human order; pursuit of the Millennium Goals; total and general disarmament; globalization and interdependence; international migration and development; human rights; and human cloning. I shall limit myself to a brief presentation of the Holy See's position regarding some of those issues.

Among the Millennium Goals, pride of place goes to the theme of poverty and development. I say pride of place, because it concerns the right to subsistence of hundreds of millions of human beings, surviving — as best they can — below the threshold of what is necessary, as well as tens of millions of undernourished children unjustly deprived of the right to live.

In order to find a lasting solution to those inhumane conditions, it is necessary to progress, under the aegis of the United Nations, towards a more flexible and more just international trade system. Furthermore, financial structures are needed which favour development and the cancellation of foreign debt for the poorest countries. Likewise, the results of scientific research and technology must be generously shared, especially in the field of health.

On that matter I need say no more, since the Holy See's position has already been presented once again by the Cardinal Secretary of State, at the conference on hunger and poverty held in New York on 20 September. I repeat only this: the urgency of the situation cannot tolerate delay. It is a question of justice.

Of immediate relevance to the supreme good of peace is the theme of total and general disarmament. If it is true that the production and sale of arms to other countries endangers peace, it follows that severe and effective international controls are needed. The commitment of the United Nations in that area is attested to by the various conventions it has supported with reference to weapons of mass destruction as well as conventional weapons. But we are only at the beginning of a long process, with huge economic interests as obstacles along our path towards peace.

The problem of weapons of mass destruction is clearly to be distinguished from that of conventional weapons; but the latter have a terrible and unending contemporary relevance in the numerous armed conflicts that stain the world with blood, and also in terrorism.

Regional armed conflicts are so numerous that there is no time to list them all. However, there are some that I cannot omit to mention. Above all there is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That conflict is not simply contained within the narrow territorial boundaries of the region itself. Those directly involved are the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, and they have the grave duty to demonstrate their desire for peace. With this end in view, a road map has been drawn up and formally accepted by both parties; may they proceed along it with determination and courage.

But that conflict is also followed with intense interest and often with passion by large sections of humanity. The Catholic Church, present in Palestine for 2,000 years, invites all concerned to turn their backs on any action likely to destroy confidence and to utter generous words of peace and make bold gestures of peace. And if peace is the fruit of justice, let it not be forgotten — as Pope John Paul II has reminded us — that there can be no justice without forgiveness; indeed, without mutual forgiveness.

Then there is the Iraqi conflict. The position of the Holy See concerning the military action of 2002-2003 is well known. Everyone can see that it did not lead to a safer world either inside or outside Iraq. The Holy See believes it is now imperative to support the present Iraqi Government in its efforts to bring the country to normality and to a political system that is substantially democratic and in harmony with the values of its historic traditions.

The Holy See is gravely concerned about various African countries scarred by bloodshed arising from mutual conflicts and even more from internal strife. They need active international solidarity: more specifically, and connaturally, the African Union needs to intervene authoritatively so as to bring all legitimate interested parties around a negotiating table. The African Union has already demonstrated its ability to act successfully in some cases: it deserves recognition and support.

I have mentioned the theme of terrorism, an aberrant phenomenon, utterly unworthy of man, which has already assumed global dimensions: today no State can presume to be safe from it. Hence, it seems obvious that terrorists can be effectively challenged only through a concerted, multilateral approach, respecting the *ius gentium*, and not through a policy of unilateralism. No one is in any doubt that the fight against terrorism means, first and foremost, neutralizing its active breeding grounds. But the underlying causes are many and complex: political, social, cultural, religious: for this reason, what is still more important is long-term action, directed, with foresight and patience, at its roots, designed to stop its spreading further and to extinguish its deadly contagious effects.

The Holy See, and the entire Catholic Church, is actively involved in this work. It is involved through its educational and charitable institutions, which, wherever they are, are committed to raising the cultural and social levels of the populations, without any discrimination, especially on religious grounds; it is involved through interreligious dialogue, which has grown in intensity ever since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Holy See will always be grateful to the authorities of other religions that demonstrate openness to such dialogue, and also to the civil authorities that encourage it, without any political interference, respecting the distinction between the religious and the civil sphere and the fundamental human right to freedom of religion.

The right to freedom of religion is sanctioned, together with other fundamental rights, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. Such fundamental human rights stand or fall together. And man stands or falls with them.

For this reason, every effort has to be made to defend them in all fields. For this to happen, one particular danger must be avoided, which is found today in various countries and social settings. It is the idea that these fundamental human rights, as sanctioned by the Universal Declaration, are expressions of a particular culture and are therefore highly relative. No, at heart, they are expressions of the human being as such, even if the fact remains that, at different times and in different cultures, they may have been and may still be differently applied, in more or less adequate and acceptable ways.

Among the fundamental rights, or rather foremost among them, as the Universal Declaration explicitly states, is the right to life of every individual. The Holy See could say a great deal about the right to life of every individual, because the essence of its message is the gospel of life.

The question of human cloning comes under the same broad heading. In a few weeks, this General Assembly will resume its debate on human cloning. In this respect, the Holy See is pleased to reaffirm its commitment to support the advancement of medical science, conducted always in a manner that respects human dignity, because it offers healing and cures for various diseases. With this end in view, the Holy See reiterates its support for the procurement and use of adult stem cells and believes that the way forward is to draw up and implement a clear convention that will result in a comprehensive ban on human cloning.

> "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,"

So begins the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is one of the many undeniable merits of the United Nations to have proposed to the conscience of all humanity, more than 50 years ago, these secure principles for progress towards peace. Over the years, however, the United Nations has needed to adapt its procedures to take account of developments on the world political scene so that its work for the promotion of peace can become more effective. The first results of the high-level commission set up for this purpose by Secretary-General Kofi Annan were published last June. The Holy See will be able to offer some explicit evaluation on the occasion of the debate on the subject to be held next week.

For now, I should simply like to recall Pope John Paul II's words for this year's International Day of Peace. He reminded us that humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development, and he called for a greater degree of international ordering. This could be brought about by giving organizations like the United Nations special prerogatives to facilitate action to prevent conflicts at times of international crisis, and also, when absolutely necessary, humanitarian intervention — that is, action aimed at disarming the aggressor.

Yet, the greater degree of international ordering could be achieved still more effectively if the United Nations were to rise to the status of a moral centre, where all nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a family of nations.

Now and in the future, the United Nations can count on the Holy See to be not only an attentive Permanent Observer, but also a travelling companion, ever ready to support its complex and difficult activity, and also to collaborate in a spirit of freedom and friendship with all the Member States.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.